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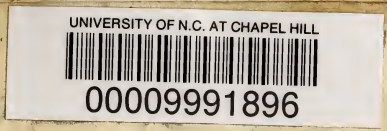
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THE

BALANCE OF COMFORT.

A NOVEL.

Printed by J. Darling, Leadenhall-Street, London.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA
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THE

BALANCE OF COMFORT;

OR THE

Old Maid and Married Woman.

A Novel.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

By Mrs. ROSS,

AUTHOR OF THE MARCHIONESS, THE COUSINS, FAMILY ESTATE, MODERN CALYPSO, PAIRED—NOT MATCHED, STRANGERS OF LINDENFELDT, FRANCE & ENGLAND, &c.

Alas! and is domestic strife,
That sorest ill of human life,
A plague so little to be fear'd
As to be wantonly incurr'd,
To gratify a fretful passion,
On every trivial provocation?
The kindest and the happiest pair
Will find occasion to forbear;
And something, every day they live,
To pity, and perhaps forgive. COWPER.

.

Qui capit ille facit.

FOURTH EDITION.

VOL. I.

London:

Printed at the Minerva Press for

A. K. NEWMAN AND CO. LEADENHALL-STREET.

1818.

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THE

BALANCE OF COMFORT.

CHAPTER I.

If lovers were to examine the characters and tempers of each other with half the attention before marriage, which they do not fail to employ after, how infinitely would many domestic circles be improved, to the happiness of individuals, and the general benefit of society!

SOPHIA LEE.

THE family of Mrs. Vernon, consisting of herself, four daughters, and a son, were seated round the breakfast-table, when the entrance of the maid-servant with a letter, sealed with a dashing coat of arms, as large as a half-crown, interrupted the

operations of the tea-maker, and caused the dry toast to fall from the hand of Elizabeth Vernon, who shrewdly suspected herself to be more immediately concerned in that letter than any one else then present.

Before we break the seal, it may not be impertinent to give our readers some idea of the family-party, who felt soon more interest than *they* can be supposed to feel in its important contents.

Mrs. Vernon had married young, and without that due regard to prudential motives, which, widely different from parsimony and worldliness, ought never to be entirely dispensed with. There is a medium between the sordid notion of money being the only good in matrimony, and the romance so common to young minds of despising it altogether; and it is the neglect of this prudential medium that occasions so much of the misery which is the acknowledged attendant on so many marriages. It was this neglect which had embittered the wedded life of

Mrs. Vernon, who, anxious only to prove to her lover the superiority of love over the dirty dross of riches, married him in a moment of passionate enthusiasm, and lamented the effects of her hasty folly through many years of cool reflection. An increasing family brought with it many wants, which a small and *not* increasing income scantily supplied; and the lover who had blessed the romance which had endeared the mistress, frequently blamed, with no small asperity, the nonsensical stuff, which had no charms in the memory of a husband who daily groaned under its wide-extended influence.

Some years of anxious struggles succeeded, and five children added more to their cares than their comforts, when the death of a distant relation unexpectedly gave them wealth. A fine estate in Hampshire became the property of Mr. Vernon, and the family prepared to enjoy it, and indemnify themselves for years of past privations by present indulgences.

But Mr. Vernon's health was considerably impaired, and sickness is a secure preventative of every other enjoyment. He lived but a short time to contrast the pleasures of wealth with the evils of poverty; and dying without a will, which he had every day *intended* to make, Mrs. Vernon found herself once more thrown from the pinnacle of greatness, to become, in a great measure, dependent on her son, who became, after the widow's *thirds* had been separated, heir to all the rest of the landed property. A very small fortune was thus once more the fate of the girls, and a confined income succeeded to the brilliant expectations which their mother had lately indulged. The guardians of young George allowed a certain sum yearly for his board and education; and the remainder, by accumulating till he was twenty-one, of which he wanted ten years at the time of his father's death, would give him the power of adding, at that time, to his sisters' portions and his mother's comforts, if he pleased.

The years moved on; Mrs. Vernon was obliged to relinquish affluence for mediocrity, and substitute the useful for the brilliant in the education of her daughters. Miss Vernon was, at the time this history opens, nearly four-and-twenty—her sister Elizabeth about a year and a half younger —Isabella nearly twenty-one; and George and Althea at the same proportion of age.

The mansion-house, commonly called Adderley Manor, which formed a part of George Vernon's property, was too large and too elegant for the income his mother possessed, and she had accordingly settled herself in a neat house in the adjoining village, and let the manor at a high rent to sir Thomas Cotman, a nabob, with a large family, a large fortune, and a very small share of knowledge or gentility.

It was at this house that the fate of Elizabeth Vernon was decided, for there she first captivated the heart of Mr. Arlingham, a young man of very extensive property, who was visiting sir Thomas. A few interviews rendered him desperately

in love; and as his person was pleasing, his manners, though grave, very good, and his situation truly desirable, Elizabeth was congratulated by her friends on the importance of her conquest. Mr. Arlingham soon whispered his tender secret in the ears of his fair enslaver; and she, "nothing loth," referred him to her mother. Mr. Arlingham had no one to consult, for he was independent of all control, his parents having long been dead, and himself emancipated for some years from the restraint of guardians. Many of the neighbours, who thought themselves authorized to sit in judgment on all matrimonial affairs, wondered he had not chosen Isabella, whose manners were sedate like his own, and who was much prettier than either of her sisters; but it was the vivacity of Elizabeth, and the sparkling intelligence of her countenance, which first attracted Arlingham's attention; and her careless good-humour, and promptitude to be pleased with every thing, rivetted her chains. Whether it was that

Isabella was naturally gloomy, or had some secret vexation preying on her spirits, he could not ascertain, but certain it was, her beautiful features were of too pensive a cast to please him, and gave him an idea of fretfulness, which destroyed the effect her loveliness might have produced on his heart. He had been some time looking round him for a woman, whose temper and understanding promised happiness, and believed he had at last found her in Elizabeth. Those *who knew* Mr. Arlingham wondered he should have disregarded fortune, although his own was sufficiently ample, and perhaps he was not the least surprised amongst them at himself. Love, however, conquered the colder suggestions of prudence, and he dispatched to Mrs. Vernon, from Adderley Manor, the letter which occasioned the little agitation mentioned at the beginning of this chapter—to which period we now revert.

"You are probably no stranger to the subject of this letter, Elizabeth," said Mrs.

Vernon, with a gratified smile, as she pointed out the signature of "Charles Arlingham" to her blushing daughter. Elizabeth acknowledged that she had, the evening before, referred the writer to her mother.—"And that, you are aware, my dear, is equal to a confession of preference on your part, and acceptance of Mr. Arlingham's proposals. I wish, however, that you should weigh well your own sentiments, and analyze your feelings towards *himself*, abstracted from his *situation*. That a competency is absolutely essential to happiness, in married life particularly, is a truth not to be controverted; but that word carries many bearings with it, and depends very materially on the opinion of the person who uses it. A competency by some is only to be found in affluence; others are satisfied to sit down in comfort only, without luxury; and this, perhaps, is the happiest condition of any. Affluence is offered to you, Elizabeth, but recollect, that money, without affection and esteem, can no more consti-

tute felicity, than those sentiments, however largely felt, without a sufficiency of the *vile dross* of the world. I am equally an enemy to the avarice which centres all good in riches, and the romance which despises them altogether."

Mrs. Vernon cast a glance of much meaning on Isabella as she spoke, and the paleness of her daughter's cheek became suddenly crimsoned.

Elizabeth assured her mother that affluence only, without a proper regard for the means by which it was obtained, would never influence her in the acceptance of a husband, and that she really felt a superior regard for Mr. Arlingham, independent of his fortune.

"If those are indeed your sentiments," replied Mrs. Vernon, "I may certainly venture to say I feel much delight in the advantageous situation now offered you. I have known too much of the misery attendant on a confined income with a large family, ever to consent to a daughter of

mine marrying under such circumstances; and though I do not expect high affluence for you all, not one of you, with my *permission*, will marry without a prospect of comfort. Mr. Arlingham's proposals are liberal enough, considering your very small fortune; and as you have, of course, given him reason to believe *you* will make no objection, and in doing that have ascertained your sentiments towards him, I may venture to answer this letter satisfactorily to him and myself. If you still wish for time to consider on so momentous an affair, my dear, now say so, for now is the only opportunity left you of honourably receding."

"I have no desire to recede, my dear mother," said Elizabeth; "I have considered every thing relative to Mr. Arlingham, his situation, and myself, before I suffered him to write to you. He is the patron of the living of Fairfield too," she added, glancing at Isabella.

"Indeed! I was not aware of that," replied her mother. "Mr. Arlingham's

character, a most important part of our consideration, is, I have ascertained, very fair. I am fearful, in these degenerate days, we must not be too fastidious, but rest satisfied to overlook errors, where there is, as in this case, a total absence of vice. Mr. Arlingham has hitherto fulfilled every duty of his situation, and has ever resigned the follies incident to youth and a state of tempting affluence."

"I believe he is very amiable and very good-tempered," replied Elizabeth, "or else I should think very little of his money."

"As to temper, my dear," answered Mrs. Vernon, "that is a quality which must ever remain doubtful *before* matrimony, on both sides; it is the only point on which each party is systematically deceitful. A courtship of ten years would never, I am persuaded, give two people an accurate conviction of each other's temper, particularly on the side of the gentleman, who, knowing the power which marriage will bestow, consents to bear with the

caprices he fully intends hereafter to punish. However, I do not mean to say that Mr. Arlingham is this kind of man—I rather incline to believe him of a placid and obliging temper; and you will, at least, be spared with him that great trial of a husband's complacency—the everlasting bickerings and strivings about money, which a narrow income must produce, and which is a fatal rock in the matrimonial voyage. It may be a vulgar adage, that 'when poverty enters the door, love flies out of the window,' but it is a very comprehensive and a very true one."

The result of the above consultation may be surmised. Mr. Arlingham received a very flattering invitation from Mrs. Vernon to the Lea, and the necessary preliminaries were immediately entered upon.

Elizabeth received the *congratulations* of her young friends, who were sincere only in the expression that they "quite *envied* her;" and love, rapture, and happiness, at least filled up the *present*.

CHAPTER II.

Misses! the tale that I relate
This lesson seems to carry—
Choose not alone a proper mate,
But proper time to marry. COWPER.

ELIZABETH had, early in the days of her courtship, informed Mr. Arlingham of the former engagement subsisting between her sister Isabella and Mr. Philipson, the curate of the parish of Fairfield, about seven miles from their present residence. This engagement had been formed under happier auspices than at present smiled upon the youthful lovers, for Mr. Philipson had at that time believed himself heir to a comfortable independence—a belief which the death of his father entirely destroyed, for he died insolvent.

Isabella, with the romantic generosity of youth and inexperience, would willingly

have overlooked this sad event, and have convinced her lover that her affection was independent of all worldly considerations; and Philipson was fully inclined to be equally absurd; for he fancied, like a raw college boy, new to love and the world, that a wife so beautiful and so affectionate to share and alleviate his cares must recompense him for all his sufferings. Love and a cottage, brown bread and potatoes, with the clear waters of the brook, appeared to them sufficient, and they believed they should in their own persons revive and realize the blissful but visionary scenes of the ancient Arcadia. Fortunately for them both, Mrs. Vernon saw with older and more experienced eyes, and positively prohibited all future intercourse, till more fortunate prospects opened on the young divine. A curacy of eighty pounds a-year appeared to her sober and reasonable mind in a very different view from that which struck on the romantic imagination of Isabella. She could pierce through the brilliant veil with which love dazzled their

optics, and see a dreary futurity, which poverty would embitter, and love himself refuse to soften.

Unwillingly, and with many complaints of her extreme and ill-judged severity, they at last were obliged to yield to her authority, and solace themselves with a distant view of the future. That forlorn, and almost desperate hope of a college living, alone presented itself; and the fellowship which Philipson had so lately laughed at became now a welcome resource. He became a fellow—accepted the curacy of Fairfield, and seemed to have no better chance than a drowsy dream of a tolerable living at the sober age of fifty, when he would perhaps receive the hand of the no-longer fair Isabella from a *sense of honour*—a poor succedaneum for love.

The offers of Mr. Arlingham to Miss Vernon opened a brighter prospect to Isabella, for he was the patron of Fairfield, and the incumbent was upwards of seventy. No doubts could be entertained of Mr. Arlingham's desire to befriend the fa-

mily of his wife when opportunity offered; and Elizabeth having related to him the severe disappointment sustained by her sister and Mr. Philipson, ventured to hint at the power he possessed of one day giving them ease and affluence, by giving him the rich rectory in his presentation.

Elizabeth was a little surprised that her lover was very sparing of his observations on the occasion, and somewhat indignant when he told her that he had, through life, made it a maxim never to give a promise of patronage which future events might render him indisposed to perform. At the same time, he said it was very improbable that he should ever wish to give the rectory in question to any one else; and that, in the meantime, a small vicarage, of about a hundred and twenty pounds a-year, contiguous to Fairfield, and tenable with the curacy, so as to enable him to serve both, was likely to be almost immediately in his gift, and he should gladly present that to Mr. Philipson, if he thought that a sufficient inducement for leaving

college, and thus relinquishing the certain, though distant preferment, which would be his in the course of years.

On this head Mrs. Vernon was to be consulted, and her prudent forethought would have induced her to forbid a marriage which still seemed full of hazard. The young people, however, petitioned; Mr. Arlingham said so much, that Elizabeth insisted that it amounted to a *promise*, and she privately insinuated the assistance she should herself be both able and happy to afford; and Mr. Arlingham at last turned the balance in Mrs. Vernon's wavering mind, by giving up to Isabella the few hundreds which were the property of Elizabeth, and which would enable the young people to furnish the small vicarage, and begin the world in tolerable comfort. She at length, though still reluctantly, consented; and the happy sisters agreed, at the instigation of Philipson, to be married on the same day.

Mrs. Vernon's objections were again overruled, and she was prevailed on not to

forbid the plan. She was not then aware of the *year of grace*, the advantages of which Philipson imprudently gave up by marrying in such haste. An income of between two and three hundred a-year was made up for the young parson; and as he decided not to wait for the death of the hearty incumbent of Fairfield, she could offer no reasonable objection for his delaying his marriage upon any other view, since nothing else appeared in the interim.

Mr. Arlingham was better informed of college business, and was well aware that Philipson very foolishly gave up a considerable sum. He mentioned to him the prudence and propriety of waiting to secure this money which his year of grace afforded: but Mr. Philipson was too much in love to be wise; and Mr. Arlingham, at his request, promised to keep his folly a secret from Mrs. Vernon; but the cold look and emphatic shrug plainly bespoke *his* sentiments on the occasion, and those sentiments evidently tinctured his future

manners towards his intended brother-in-law.

The smiles and joy which reigned around reconciled Mrs. Vernon in some measure to the precipitancy of Isabella's marriage, and she hailed with delight the returning smiles and bloom on the cheek of her happy daughter.

It was settled that Althea should accompany Elizabeth on a tour they projected to the Lakes, and greatly they wished that Mr. Arlingham would extend the invitation to Isabella and Mr. Philipson, whom prudence would otherwise necessarily confine at home; but Arlingham was silent on the subject, and delicacy forbade Elizabeth's interference.

Isabella, who was of a very retired and domestic turn, seemed not to notice the omission, and Philipson, though he would have liked the frolic, was too much a lover to regret its loss, since Isabella would be with him, and she was "*all the world.*" The furnishing and beautifying the pretty *little* vicarage would amply and delightful-

ly occupy their time; and Mrs. Vernon, at least, was glad they were not included in a tour which *their* situation would render very unnecessary.

The day at length arrived which was to unite the two pairs of lovers, and the difference of their prospects and condition was apparent in the difference of their destinations on that important occasion. Elizabeth's delicacy and affection for her sister forbade any display of dress or ornament beyond what Isabella could afford to imitate; and a plain white muslin, with an elegant lace cap and veil, equally adorned each lovely girl. But after breakfast, Elizabeth exchanged this simple attire for an elegant habit and hat; and taking an affectionate leave of her family, was handed by the grave and sober Arlingham to a splendid landau. Althea followed, and the carriage drove off in a dashing style, with four beautiful horses and two flashy out-riders; whilst Isabella and her husband, in an humble hack chaise, drove quietly to Feltham Vicarage.

CHAPTER III.

Perhaps the best way to limit the indiscreet attachments of young people would be to allow them as unrestrained an intercourse with each other as may consist with the respect due to the lady, in places where no co-operating agitation of the feelings should induce that hasty decision from which there is no future appeal. Were this the case, half the eternal passions of nineteen would evaporate before the parties reached the age of one-and-twenty, while those who had been once so mistaken would learn to distrust their own judgment. SOPHIA LEE.

THE absence of her daughters left Mrs. Vernon full liberty and leisure to reflect, which the previous bustle of the last few weeks had continually interrupted. It was indeed too late to reflect to any efficient purpose, since the union which drew forth these meditations had irrevocably taken place; but still they would intrude, and with them a fearful idea that she had

been too yielding in allowing of so precipitate a marriage as that of Isabella. She had found it impossible to resist the importunate entreaties of Philipson, or the wishes, better imagined than expressed, of both her daughters; and as she listened to their animated pictures of the future, and Isabella's intended appropriation of her small but sufficient income, she fancied *then* that she was not blamable in giving her sanction to an immediate union. The sisters seemed to depend entirely on Arlingham's future patronage; and Philipson himself, though he had been disappointed in the manners of his rich brother-in-law, which, quiet and cool to all, had been invariably *cold* and distant to himself, yet believed he would not refuse to assist the family of his wife, if it should hereafter be required. But though all these hopes had appeared to Mrs. Vernon, through the sanguine painting of youth, as certain to be realized, she fell into a different train of thinking, now they were no longer nigh to refute her objections or relieve her

doubts. The reluctance of Mr. Arlingham to *promise* the living in his gift, and a certain constrained air towards Mr. Philipson, which he had always shewn, now recurred more forcibly to her mind, and she began to repent the compliance into which she had been persuaded. Her son, too, though yet too young to act for himself in money matters, had disappointed her extremely, by his silence respecting the future. His fortune, though at present limited by his guardians, would, in a very few years, be ample, and entirely at his own disposal; and his mother had mentioned to him the situation, hopes, and wishes of his sister Isabella and her lover, in the fond hope that some liberal promise on his part would still farther authorize the permission she had been persuaded to give. But George Vernon was older in prudence than in years, and highly approved the resolution of Arlingham in never making promises—a plan which he determined to adopt. He had intended to have been at the wedding of his sisters,

but a few days before he had sent a letter of careless congratulation and good wishes, and without assigning any sufficient reason, had declared his inability to be present at the ceremony. He praised Elizabeth's choice, because Mr. Arlingham was rich, and quizzed Isabella and "the parson," of whose future comforts he drew a ridiculous, but not very fraternal picture; and strenuously advised Althea to profit by the opportunity afforded her by the visit she was about to pay at Westhaven Park, and make as good a match as her elder sister had done.

All this, now that Mrs. Vernon was left to herself, preyed upon her spirits, and repentance, as far as related to Isabella, came aggravated by the conviction that it came too late. She felt the want of Althea at this moment, whose regulated and sensible mind, and buoyant spirits, had always been her greatest comfort in former troubles. She regretted she had not accompanied Isabella home, where the sight of their happiness (*present* hap-

piness at least) might have reconciled her to herself. Her eldest girl did not live at home; and her house, so lately the scene of gaiety and bustle, and filled with smiling faces, now seemed melancholy in the extreme.

From this uncomfortable state, she was roused by the unexpected arrival of a very old and valued friend, who came, unknowing of the events of the morning, to pass a few weeks with Mrs. Vernon. To this lady, Mrs. Letitia Charlton, Mrs. Vernon recapitulated the whole affair, and felt relieved by the communication. Her spirits revived as she listened to her sensible old friend, and felt relieved from her own sensations. The evening concluded in much greater comfort than she had anticipated; and the friends projected a ride, in the course of a day or two, to Feltham, in Mrs. Charlton's carriage.

This lady was one of the maiden sisterhood, which those who knew nothing of her early history wondered at, and not

without reason. She was still sufficiently pleasing in her person and features to convince every one she had once been handsome; her form was still good—her manners lively and graceful; and what rendered her celibacy still more extraordinary was, that her fortune was, and always had been, very ample. Particular circumstances had prevented her becoming the wife of a gentleman to whom she was greatly attached, and by whom she was deservedly beloved, and the recollection of him *preserved* her from matrimony through the rest of her life. She had been the schoolfellow and steady friend of Mrs. Vernon, and in many of her distresses had been her greatest comfort and resource.

"You know my opinion of matrimony in general, my dear," said Mrs. Charlton, in reply to some remark of Mrs. Vernon's, "and that I am by no means an advocate for it. I see a number of different families—I penetrate into the *interior* of their houses, and I see them very frequently

divested of all disguise. The view is not likely to change my ideas on the subject; and the more I see and learn of married life, the more I am reconciled to that of an *old maid.* I cannot see, in my various views of those situations, that happiness is more or less really existing in affluence, though most certainly the contrary extreme is worse. But I really think that the old adage of 'enough is a little more than a man has,' is very true. Mr. Arlingham is rich, and thus one, and perhaps the greatest trial of a man's temper, is avoided. I do not know him, and therefore cannot pronounce upon Elizabeth's chance for happiness. Mr. Philipson is comparatively poor—but only in comparison; he appears to me to have enough for comfort without luxury, if they manage their income properly; and as far as money goes, considering their present possessions and their future prospects, I do not see that you are right in blaming yourself for having given your

sanction to their marriage. So much depends on temper and previous habits, independent of fortune and situation. Isabella, for whom you seem most anxious, is of a retired, domestic, unexpensive turn, and I conclude she has ascertained, as far as a man's real character can be ascertained before marriage, that Mr. Philipson is of a correspondent disposition. In my opinion, women would be much happier single, if they would believe it; but girls will not believe, and they can only be convinced by a dangerous experiment of the truth. All you, or any other parent can do, is to take care that your children choose prudently with respect to character, and, as much as possible, to fortune also; and the true art of regulating the latter point is, not so much as to the *quantity* of wealth, as in adapting its proportions to the disposition of the parties. Isabella is formed for retirement and the mild duties of domestic life; Elizabeth will be happier in more active scenes, and on a more extensive and more brilliant theatre. Each

appears to be placed by marriage in the sphere most appropriate to themselves, and the rest must depend on temper, and on circumstances over which you can have no control, and for which you cannot be accountable. One has affluence; the other a competency. I *hope* my favourite Althea—but I cannot expect, and I ought not, perhaps, to wish, that she may live and die in 'single blessedness."

"And you really think from observation, that celibacy is the happier state?" said Mrs. Vernon.

"Decidedly so; and you, as a married woman, cannot doubt it."

"Indeed I am convinced of its truth," replied Mrs. Vernon, with a sigh, "and I shall but too probably live to hear my opinion echoed by my daughters, happy as they are at this time."

"I have talked a great deal," said Mrs. Charlton, "and very much like a *disappointed* old maid; but I have spoken from actual and deep observation, and put my own individual feelings on the subject out

of the question. After all, however, happiness is so entirely ideal, and depends so much on circumstances, that I believe no one can ascertain, out of his own actual experience, the best means of securing it. The only *certain* source of comfort is with ourselves individually—the consciousness of doing what is right as far as we can: the rest we must leave to fate."

Mrs. Vernon was easier after this conversation, and retired to rest, to hope, at least, for the best.

CHAPTER IV.

Volumes of report
Run with their false and most contrarious quests
Upon thy doings. SHAKESPEARE.

THE continual arrival of friends and neighbours, to offer congratulations and ask questions, kept Mrs. Vernon and her

friend from the Vicarage for the following three days. Very various, and, to Mrs. Charlton, very amusing, were the remarks and animadversions of the good people on the two weddings, as they ate their cake and sipped their chocolate: some, and particularly the elderly ladies, were delighted with the *prudence* of Elizabeth in marrying so rich a man, and thus securing what they believed the great essential of happiness; whilst the younger ones, who envied both sisters, and had themselves evinced no dislike of Mr. Arlingham and his wealth, affected to admire the more romantic and *interesting* situation of Isabella, thus sacrificing her brightest hopes for the man she loved, and retirement.

"It shews such lovely sensibility," said Miss Leonora Twisleton, "and Mr. Philipson is so divinely handsome! What are riches compared to mutual love?"

"But wealth is a very pretty addition to mutual love," said her mother, "and indeed no bad substitute for it. Sensibi-

lity! I hate the word, it always sounds to my ears as synonymous with folly."

Miss Twisleton sighed, and declared she had rather go through every possible suffering with the man she loved, than enjoy all the delights which money, base filthy dross! could procure. Mrs. Charlton took a pinch of snuff, and looked contemptuously at the affected and sentimental declaimer.

"I should think," said Mrs. Twisleton, "that dear Isabella must have felt a little hurt, when she saw her sisters enter that elegant carriage, and set off on such a delightful jaunt, while she had only a dirty hack, and a dull ride of a few miles to a poor vicarage. I could not help pitying her, poor thing! she *looked* happy, but still she must have had her *thoughts:* I hope he will make her happy, pretty creature! I have always had such a dread of my girls marrying poorly, that I may perhaps have been too particular. Certainly they have refused some offers, which other girls would have been glad

enough to snap at; I never like to see young women accept the first offers made them—it looks so like *despair*."

Mrs. Vernon could not help returning the significant smile of Mrs. Charlton, as they both glanced their eyes on the thin, bony, upright form of Miss Twisleton, who had evidently passed her thirtieth year, and was the *youngest* of five *young things*, who had reason to lament the fastidious delicacy of their mamma, in having kept them all unmarried.

The last party who paid their congratulatory call were the nabob's family from Adderley Manor, who came in great state, and some of them with no very placid feelings towards *one* of the youthful brides. Mr. Arlingham had been destined by lady Cotman for one of her numerous train of daughters, who, in spite of their dark sallow skins and large unmeaning eyes, she insisted on calling beauties. Sir Thomas was disappointed, but he was so naturally good-tempered, that he could not feel

any sentiment of ill-will towards the more fortunate Elizabeth Vernon, who he candidly allowed was much prettier than his own girls.

"Faith, madam," said sir Thomas to Mrs. Vernon, "your fair and pretty Elizabeth quite cut out my young ladies with our young squire; I did intend him for Clary here, but he chose to pick and chuse for himself, it seems. I don't blame him—not I."

"I'm sure *I* don't," replied Miss Clara, with a toss of pride and petulance—"I should have given Mr. Arlingham—that is, I *did* give him a very different answer to what you might have done. *Intend* me for him, indeed! I like that too."

"Yes, yes, my dear, you *would* have liked it, no doubt," replied the baronet, with a facetious wink; "but the grapes were sour. However, make the best on't now by all means, that's but right and fair."

"The Miss Cotmans, with their fortunes and their pretensions, may *chuse* for

themselves, without your interference, sir Thomas," said lady Cotman, angrily; "and had Mr. Arlingham been still more urgent than he was, Miss Cotman would have still been unpropitious. There is more requisite than money, and Mr. Arlingham's temper every one knows—but I beg pardon, I had forgot."

Mrs. Vernon was not at all alarmed by this half-uttered inuendo, for she pierced through the veil of disappointed art and ill-nature which characterized lady Cotman.

"I should be devilish angry if I thought Clary had refused such a match," said sir Thomas, "for there is enough girls besides to provide for; and Clary is no chicken, nor it isn't much of a lounge to be a dry, withered, frumpish old maid—is it, ma'am?"

This question was addressed to Mrs. Charlton, accompanied by a free pinch of her knee, for sir Thomas was what is called a *funny* man. Mrs. Charlton, though not accustomed to these sort of

manners, saw that he was really a friendly well-meaning man, and with a quiet smile assured him she was not at all displeased with her situation, as an *old* maid, though she hoped not a frumpish one.

"Why, you don't mean to persuade me that you are actually an old maid?" said he, with a smile of doubt and approbation; "if you are, I am sure you need not, unless you liked."

Mrs. Charlton replied with a sigh, and sir Thomas had too much feeling to pursue a subject which evidently disturbed her.

"Have you heard from the bridal party yet, Mrs. Vernon?" said lady Cotman; then, without waiting for an answer, she added, "it must have been rather mortifying to Mrs. Philipson to see her sister set off in such a very different style: I think she was quite right not to accompany her on so gay a tour, however, since she must on her return have experienced such a reverse of situation: but certainly

girls with only pretty faces for their portions cannot *all* expect to marry men of consequence."

"Pretty faces seem to carry the day, in spite of good fortunes though, my dear," said sir Thomas.

Lady Cotman frowned, and coloured angrily.

"Marriage," observed Mrs. Vernon, "is at best so precarious a lottery, that it is difficult to ascertain who will draw a prize, or whether, when drawn, it will continue to prove one; it is not always fortune which secures the prize of happiness, and Bella may probably be happier in obscurity than her more splendid sister: it is a state of so many trials and cares, that I believe the single have a much greater chance for comfort than the married; but it is a difficult thing, if not impossible, to persuade our daughters to think the same."

"Every station has its peculiar cares, I suppose," replied lady Cotman; "but I should think the married state, with plenty

of money, must be the happiest, except, indeed, that of a rich widow without incumbrances."

"Thank you, my dear," said sir Thomas.

Mrs. Vernon and Mrs. Charlton looked at each other with surprise at so strange an avowal; lady Cotman drew up her plump person, with a look of malignant satisfaction; Miss bit her lips and smiled; and sir Thomas whistled: a silent two minutes succeeded, and then lady Cotman coldly repeated her good wishes, and followed by her prim daughters, led the way to her gaudy carriage. Sir Thomas staid a moment behind, to shake hands with the ladies, and invite them to Adderley; and then hurried off to his scowling wife and insipid daughters, to listen to ill-natured remarks on the ladies they had left, and prophetic forebodings of much unhappiness to the new-married parties.

CHAPTER V.

'Tis a bower of Arcadian sweets,
Whose Flora is still in her prime.

— — — —

He that holds fast the golden mean,
And lives contentedly between
The little and the great,
Feels not the wants that pinch the poor,
Nor plagues that haunt the rich man's door,
Imbittering all his state. COWPER.

THE day following lady Cotman's call left Mrs. Vernon and her friend at liberty to pay their intended visit to the happy pair at Feltham Vicarage. It is superfluous to say that all was unmixed felicity between the young couple. Four days after marriage is not the period to determine on the happiness of the state.

Mrs. Charlton was a most welcome guest to the bride, though, ignorant of the

circumstances which had occurred, she came unprovided with a wedding gift. With all the pride and pleasure of a young and happy wife, Isabella led her mother and her friend over her little domain, expatiating on the conveniences and comforts already collected there, and pointing out the improvements which were yet to be added. Mrs. Charlton, to whom Philipson was a perfect stranger, assiduously watched him, though, unsuspectedly, through the day. To every plan of Isabella's he appeared to accede with great readiness, and in the various alterations she suggested, he generally made considerable additions.

"Here," said he, "you shall have a *boudoir*, my love, opening into a conservatory, and at the other end a small reading-room for summer. That clumsy veranda must be changed for something much lighter, and carried up higher. I foresee work for at least two summers."

"And your study," replied Isabella, "must be new done; and the new ve-

randa carried round, for the windows to open into it, down to the ground; and——"

"The living is your own, now and for ever, I conclude, sir?" said Mrs. Charlton, rather gravely.

"Not at present, but the next presentation will doubtless make it mine for my life," replied Mr. Philipson; "and in this persuasion, you know, one is quite right to make the place habitable, as in all probability we shall spend the greatest part of our lives here."

Mrs. Vernon, laughingly, advised them to unite prudence with taste; and Mrs. Charlton, who had watched Philipson's sparkling eyes, as he talked of his projected improvements, anticipated one source, at least, of improvident and thoughtless expence, which she was well aware could not be enjoyed without embarrassing, if not ruinous circumstances, and which was generally very enticing to most gentlemen, whether they could afford it or not. She knew too little of Mr. Phi-

lipson at present, however, to venture on any remark to him; but she intended to put Mrs. Vernon on her guard, and advise her to endeavour to check, in its beginning, a taste so likely to involve a small fortune.

Isabella's arrangements in her department were well conducted, and appeared already to be well disposed for future economy; although so newly become the mistress of her small establishment, she had allotted to each the business which belonged to her station, and seemed quite at home in her matronly character. Mrs. Charlton believed, that if, in future times, the misfortune of pecuniary difficulties awaited them, Mrs. Philipson, at least, would be blameless in her own management. Of him she thought less highly in that respect; and she believed she saw in him a man who had been profuse, and who was little able to withstand the temptations which might again assail him. This opinion was not formed during the first day or two of their acquaintance,

or in consequence of his evident taste for alteration and improvement, but was the offspring of a very vigilant observation, induced by the interest she felt for the daughter of her dearest and earliest friend, and renewed through many succeeding days.

She and Mrs. Vernon passed three days at Feltham, and then returned to the Lea, from whence, however, Mrs. Charlton's carriage, almost every afternoon, conveyed them to the Vicarage, for the fortnight following; and thus afforded Mrs. Charlton the opportunity of studying Philipson's character. How far she formed a correct idea of him, the succeeding pages will shew.

During this pleasant intercourse between the two families, many gay letters arrived from the bridal party on its tour: Mrs. Arlingham wrote in high spirits, delighted with every thing she beheld, and perfectly convinced that *she* was the happiest woman in creation, and that it was impossible she should ever be otherwise. She de-

scribed Mr. Arlingham as indulgence itself to every wish, and that none remained ungratified, except that of having her dear Isabella a partaker of the delightful scenes she was passing through.

Elizabeth wrote like a bride, who saw every thing through the pleasantest medium; and indeed she appeared justified in such an opinion, since all things seemed united to render a continuance of her present situation permanent.

Elizabeth generally wrote to her mother —Althea to her sister Isabella; and she saw, perhaps more clearly, the real character of her magnificent brother-in-law than his wife could do.

"Having thus given you a description of the soft beauties of Windermere, and the grander features of Skiddaw," she continued, in a letter addressed to Isabella, "I must just give you my opinion of Arlingham; but you must remember that this opinion, after all, is only formed by *trifles*, and I may, very probably, before long, see occasion to retract it. To tell you the

truth, I think Elizabeth will require all her native good-humour and good spirits, to combat with a very odd temper; at present he is of course submissive enough, and does not oppose the gay, and somewhat thoughtless schemes of his lovely wife; but I think I can see a lurking something beneath his acquiescent smile, which would contradict her, if he did not recollect that during the honeymoon, at least, the lady was to reign. I have more than once caught a half-uttered allusion to *expence*, which, as if ashamed of it, he hastily recalled, and assented to the thing proposed. There is certainly a struggle in his mind, between a desire to appear munificent, and a dread of paying for it. Elizabeth at present does as she likes—buys what she pleases—and spends his money with great eclat. *She* has pressed upon me more finery than I chose to accept. Mr. Arlingham's generosity has not shone forth, since the wedding present of my gown and lace veil; I am well satisfied to have it so, for I believe I do not

much admire him, and I hate to be obliged to those I do not love.

"I am delighted with the new and beautiful scenes through which I have lately passed; but I am not sorry to be returning to a more quiet and settled life. I have some doubts whether I shall not defer my visit to Westhaven Park, till I have refreshed myself by one to you. Elizabeth opposes this, however, so strenuously, that I have not yet decided on any thing. To tell you the truth of the matter, the news of my dear Mrs. Charlton's present residence at our cottage is an almost irresistible temptation to me to forego the gaieties of our bridal *entrée* to Westhaven Park; and the distance from one place to the other is so small, that I conclude Mr. Arlingham can send for me when he wishes for me again. I long to see your comfortable and quiet arrangements, my dear Isabella, which, if less splendid than those of Westhaven, will, I suspect, be more agreeable to my unambitious mind; and certain I am, that Philipson's cheerful care-

less laugh will be more in unison with my feelings, than the careful brow and thoughtful smile of Arlingham."

Such was Althea's opinion of her rich brother; but the letter was written only for the inspection of Isabella; for Althea could not help owning her judgment premature, and she did not wish to infuse any unnecessary fears into her mother's mind, to whom she wrote only of the beauties of her tour, and the happiness of her sister.

A fortnight more gave Mrs. Vernon the sweet hope of again seeing her dispersed family collected around her, for Mr. Arlingham, at the pressing entreaty of Elizabeth, had consented to take her and Althea to the Lea, in order to give their brother, who was come there for a few weeks, and Mrs. Charlton, who was much beloved by them all, a joyful meeting. Mr. and Mrs. Philipson met them at their mother's; and Mrs. Vernon enjoyed a week of almost perfect happiness, in the society of her children, and the view of their felicity.

CHAPTER VI.

Why, sir, I trust I may have leave to speak;
And speak I will; I am no child, no babe;
— — — —
My tongue will tell the anger of my heart,
Or else my heart, concealing it, will break;
And rather than it shall, I will be free,
E'en to the uttermost, as I please, in words.

SHAKESPEARE.

"THIS is really a most delightful meeting, and perfectly unexpected," said Isabella to Elizabeth, as the three sisters were walking round the pretty miniature shrubberies of the Lea.

Althea looked significantly at Mrs. Arlingham, and both smiled.

"What does that mean?" asked Isabella.

"Why nothing, my dear, only that Arlingham and I had a little—just a little

matrimonial argument about this same meeting," replied Elizabeth, laughing.

"I hope you did not 'squeeze too much lemon into this matrimonial sherbet,' as lady Townly says?" answered Isabella.

"Oh dear! no—not at all," Elizabeth said—"I was very humble and pretty-behaved, in my words, looks, and manner, as Althea knows, though she says nothing; but it was such an unheard-of circumstance that a pretty bride should give up her own wishes during the honeymoon! I was determined not to be the first to break our ancient charter, so I fought, though with very harmless weapons, and, as you see, conquered. Althea, why do you look so grave and thoughtful? *You know* I was all submission in words, &c."

"Yes, but I know also that your submission bordered very much upon irony, and declared you *determined* to carry your point," replied Althea; "and I saw also that Arlingham has no taste for being

laughed at, however adroitly it may be done, and that though he gave up *now*, his very concession said plainly enough, 'this is your day, but mine shall come.' If you are wise, you will not exact too much."

"You will certainly be an old maid, Althea."

"Very likely, and very willingly shall I be one of my dear Mrs. Charlton's sisterhood; and I hope I shall be just like her, whether married or single," Althea replied.

"The truth of the matter is just this," said Mrs. Arlingham—"Charles chooses always to travel with his own horses, and is therefore in a constant fidget about their being overworked, and all that sort of nonsense. He fancied it was a terrible addition to our journey to come round again here, instead of going immediately to Westhaven Park, and talked very abominably of additional expence, and prudence, and I know not what unbecoming stuff. I *laughed* him out of his absurdities this time—perhaps I may scold him out of

the next. I have no patience to see a rich man mean, and try to cover his meanness with a high-sounding name. My own disposition is so far from any thing like grudging, that I must break him of it. I believe, however, after all, from what he said last night, that he will not fetch you to Westhaven, Althea, if you do not agree to go with us."

"Well, I will think of that before you go," replied Althea; "but I own I should like to stay a little while with Isabella before I go there, and had rather you got over some of your wedding bustle of receiving visits and displaying your finery. Bella has got all that out of the way, you know."

"Oh!" replied Isabella, gaily, "my troubles of that sort were soon over. My humbler friends soon paid their quiet *tea-visits*, and my plain white gown and unornamented bonnet were as quickly glanced at and forgotten. I have neither park, equipage, jewels, nor fine furniture,

to talk of or display, nor do I wish to have."

"They are pretty things enough, however," replied Elizabeth, somewhat piqued, "and I would not willingly exchange them for a poultry-yard, donkey-cart, coral necklace, and plain white dimity. So you see, my dear, we each bid fair to be happy, I suppose, since we appear each to have that we prefer."

"Husband included, I hope," added Althea, who saw that Isabella was a little displeased at Elizabeth's somewhat pompous enumeration, and contemptuous opposition of their several possessions.

The three young men at that moment joined the fair sisters.

"Surely, Elizabeth," said her husband, "you forget we had recently had a heavy shower when you came out in those beautiful blue kid shoes."

"That I certainly did, and I dare say I have caught cold," she replied, "and spoiled my shoes, I see, into the bargain."

"And you gave fifteen shillings for them

only a week ago, I actually believe," he returned, with increasing gravity.

"Ah! that I actually did," said she, laughing.

"Upon my word, Mrs. Arlingham, that was unthinking, very much so—very imprudent—very profuse indeed! Why don't you have proper walking shoes, like Mrs. Philipson's?"

"Really," replied Elizabeth, with a smile bordering on a sneer, "your tender solicitude for my health is very flattering, for such only can influence your present thoughts. I certainly should follow your advice respecting my shoes, but that when I get to Westhaven, I shall probably always use the carriage."

Mr. Arlingham looked very grave, and Althea sighed. Elizabeth laughed and talked gaily, but she failed of bringing back his smiles; and Mrs. Charlton, who met them returning to the house, evinced by her countenance that she thought all was not right between them.

"My dear Mrs. Charlton," said Eliza-

beth, "you look as if you were deep in calculation. What is your subject? Ways and means? or the price of shoe-leather? If the latter, I can assist you, for I have had a fifteen-shilling lecture."

"Flippancy is not wit, Mrs. Arlingham," said her husband; and bowing gravely to Mrs. Charlton, he disengaged his arm from that of his wife, and walked hastily forward to the house.

Isabella and Philipson turned into another walk with George Vernon; and Althea's eyes, filled with tears, turned towards the wondering Mrs. Charlton with a look of deep regret.

"What is all this about?" asked Mrs. Charlton.

"Oh! nothing worth thinking of," answered Elizabeth, forcing a laugh, for she was a little astonished at Mr. Arlingham's offended manner.

"Oh! do not think so," exclaimed Althea; "do not begin thus early to treat your husband as nothing, and thus trifle with his feelings. You have unnecessarily

provoked him to-day, and I am much mistaken if his is a temper which may be safely tried in this manner. Do pray go and try to sooth the angry spirit you have raised, and do not let my mother see any clouds on either brow."

"Yes, and so give up at once all future empire," returned Elizabeth, warmly—"Don't you know that now is the very time to establish my authority? I should hate to be so tame and spiritless as to concede now."

"Spirit!" said Mrs. Charlton; "aye, that is the fatal word that has ruined the peace of so many married pairs, and I grieve to see will, if not timely checked, endanger yours, Elizabeth. Surely it is a poor spirit which can wish to rule a husband, and a very turbulent one that is determined to strive for such a sway. Shew a better spirit than this—call up a gentle one, my dear girl; and do not blush to conciliate him you have offended, rather than aggravate your offence by braving his anger. You may find it easy now to conciliate,

but you will not always do so; and believe me, you will not cure his faults by displaying your own."

Elizabeth thought too highly of Mrs. Charlton to be refractory, and she immediately followed Arlingham, whom she found more offended than she had expected, and more difficult to appease.

"You have offended me, Mrs. Arlingham, I acknowledge," said he, "and I cannot shake off at once the vexation and surprise I feel at behaviour so unlike what I had expected from you. I hate affected and flippant repartee, which is any thing but wit. I do not affect to be witty myself, and I will not be the but of it from my wife. You say, however, you are sorry you did offend, and I will not remember that you did so longer than I can help."

With this ungracious pardon, and a cold salute, Elizabeth was obliged to be content, though she thought it very odd that so young a wife should have so little influence.

Mr. Arlingham endeavoured to shake

off his chagrin before Mrs. Vernon; but Althea, who studied his character more closely, and was much more affected by his anger than his wife, saw, through his endeavours to be gay, a strong indication of the true sulky, and she anticipated much serious uneasiness for her sister, if she still attempted to struggle for supremacy.

CHAPTER VII.

What joy to wind along the cool retreat,
To stop and gaze on Delia as I go!
To mingle sweet discourse with kisses sweet,
And teach my lovely scholar all I know!

HAMMOND.

.....

Not he, of wealth immense possest,
Tasteless who piles his massy gold,
Amongst the number of the blest
Should have his glorious name enroll'd.

FRANCIS'S *Horace.*

A DAY or two passed before Mr. Arlingham was quite restored to good-humour; and this early display of a determined temper convinced his wife that he would not be offended with impunity, and the lesson, though harshly given, was of use.

The remainder of the visit passed off

without any other fracas, and Mr. Arlingham's countenance had quite regained its usual cold serenity, when it was again overcast by a proposition of Mrs. Charlton to take Althea with her to Torrington Lodge, after she had paid a short visit to Mrs. Philipson—a proposal to which Althea seemed very willing to agree.

"You will recollect, Miss Vernon," said Mr. Arlingham, very gravely, "that Torrington, though not a *great* way from Westhaven, is a day's journey for *my* horses to go and come, and that we shall be a good deal engaged in visiting and riding about for a few weeks after we get home. You had better go with us now, and Mrs. Charlton can fetch you away when you are tired of our gaieties: I don't intend they should be eternal, I promise you, but people expect a little at first, I suppose."

"You and I must certainly have some very serious conversation," said Elizabeth, with a smile, which ill concealed her real chagrin: "I must positively ascertain

how much *I* may expect, for I am inclined to fancy I shall find the old adage true—'Happy are they who expect nothing."

"Perhaps we think alike on that point at least," replied Mr. Arlingham, sullenly.

Elizabeth bit her lips, and a short silence followed.

"Well then, you will go with us, Althea?" said Elizabeth, with a look of entreaty.

Althea found her going to Westhaven was a point much insisted on; and believing her presence might perhaps check in its infancy that disposition to pertinacity which the new-married folks equally displayed towards their own opinion, she gave up her own wishes, and a present visit to Isabella and Mrs. Charlton, and finally agreed to occupy the back seat of the barouche, with Mrs. Arlingham's maid—an arrangement of Mr. Arlingham's, against her sister's wishes, but with which she was obliged to comply. Althea had easily discovered that Mr. Arlingham was fully conscious of the honour

he had conferred on a portionless girl, and that he expected, in return for such condescension, an unresisting submission to his sovereign will. Althea believed she could have so submitted; but Elizabeth's spirit was high, and somewhat arrogant; and where her sister with mild good sense would have given up a point, only perhaps to gain it more securely at a future time, she could not help trying for power, and sometimes but too clearly evinced her contempt for her husband.

Mrs. Charlton finding Althea had decided on going first to Westhaven—a measure she much approved, as matters stood, agreed to remain a short time longer amongst her friends; and whenever her young favourite was inclined to quit the gaieties of Westhaven, she promised to go for her, and convey her either home or to her own abode.

Isabella reluctantly gave her consent to this scheme, for Althea was her favourite sister, and a similarity of temper and pursuits had drawn them much more toge-

ther. Though past the age of romantic simplicity, which ceases to appear either natural or pleasing after very early youth, Isabella yet believed she had pursued that path which conducted directly to happiness, and she felt in herself every disposition to act so as to render it permanent. She did not expect undisturbed felicity in any sublunary state, perhaps in married life less than in any other, but she hoped that compliance with her husband's wishes, attention to his comforts, and an economical distribution of their small income, would ensure a very tolerable degree of wedded happiness. Mr. Philipson had always appeared to her perfectly good-humoured, and, though gay and thoughtless as a single man, she hoped he would look forward, and grow prudent. Accustomed all her life to regulate her expences with a sparing hand, and knowing how much apparent comfort her mother had always contrived to secure to herself and family with a very small income, she had gradually reduced her wishes and expectations to

a very circumscribed scale; and knowing little of the real character of Mr. Philipson, she flattered herself he would readily conform himself to her own humble plans of unexpensive but elegant retirement. Literature was always within their reach, and to her a never-failing source of delight. They had a pretty little room, neatly fitted up, and Mrs. Charlton's liberality had converted it into more than a nominal library. Here Philipson had declared a thousand times, with Isabella by his side to listen to him, he could contentedly pass hour after hour in reading aloud, whilst she was to work—here they were to plan all their little improvements and embellishments, which were to be tasteful, absolutely necessary, and a *mere trifle* in point of expence. Of the *expences* of taste she acknowledged she knew nothing, but as *he* did, she left every thing of that sort to him, perfectly aware that he must have employment, and that to unite the *utile* with the *dulce* was in every respect desirable, particularly as he could do a great

deal for "such a mere trifle." He considered the place as decidedly his own, and therefore observed that he might as well make it pleasant and convenient for his own enjoyment, as pay the same sum—or, what was the same thing, leave his widow to pay it, for dilapidations hereafter. Isabella agreed this was all very fair and proper; and the spring of the following year was to be the season of great alteration and busy employment.

Mrs. Vernon laughed, and advised prudence, which Philipson insisted he was strictly adhering to; and Mrs. Charlton looked placidly grave and said nothing, fearful lest, having been a bountiful giver to the young couple, she might be condemned as presuming and forward.

Such were the ideas and prospects with which Isabella, at least, began her matrimonial career. Philipson's were in some respects similar; but others of a very different nature, after a few months had gone by, began to occupy his less quiet and contented brain.

We do not, however, intend to anticipate—circumstances, not descriptions, must develop our characters; and though many of them may appear very trivial and unimportant *in print*, the heart of many a "*married woman*" will acknowledge their interest in *real life*.

After having spent a fortnight at the Lea, Mr. and Mrs. Arlingham and Althea proceeded to Westhaven, accompanied by George Vernon, who found, in the close and uncommunicative temper of *this* new brother, something much more congenial to his own than the careless hilarity and generous imprudence of Philipson. Too young to discriminate characters and situations, Vernon could not see that the prudent calculations, and almost niggardly economy, which might have been praiseworthy in the curate of Feltham, were disgraceful to the rich owner of Westhaven; and not being himself of a liberal turn, in any one acceptation of the word, he was easily induced to adopt those opinions which favoured his own, and willingly fol-

lowed the advice of Mr. Arlingham, and withheld a pecuniary compliment he had, or fancied he had, intended for his sister Isabella, on the plea that Philipson was an extravagant fellow, and that he would suppose, if he once found a lavish friend in his wife's brother, that he might pursue his foolish plans of building and improving through his means. The circumstances in which George Vernon stood with his own family had not produced a kindly effect with any of them. He felt himself a person of greater consequence than they were disposed to consider him, and his high ideas of wealth seemed to remove him to an immeasurable distance from them, and produced a coldness and arrogance in his manners, which they were not at all times disposed to submit to quietly. Elizabeth he now condescended to consider as his equal, and he attended to her with some degree of deference; whilst Althea, still poor, but not humble, might have been mortified by his sarcastic retorts, or, more generally, total neglect, had she not consi-

dered such conduct as the feeble and contemptible efforts of a schoolboy, unworthy the anger of a sensible woman.

CHAPTER VIII.

This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
Unto our gentle senses. SHAKESPEARE.

.....

Search your own breast, and mark with honest care
What seeds of folly nature planted there.
FRANCIS'S *Horace.*

WESTHAVEN Park was too much like other parks to require a particular description; it boasted the usual proportion of wood and water—hill and valley; and the house, which was an ancient and very large structure, possessed more grandeur and *family* consequence, than lightness or elegance.

The father of Mr. Arlingham had in-

herited this place from a long line of respectable, though untitled ancestors, and had preserved, with proud veneration, the Gothic windows and oaken wainscots of the years of old. The present possessor pursued the same system, from a mixture of family pride and the love of money; and it must be owned the latter feeling greatly preponderated in the passion he expressed, not only for the Gothic windows, but for the cumbrous and faded magnificence of the old velvet furniture and tapestry hangings, which, though suitable enough to the general appearance of the mansion, were more indebted to their antiquity than their beauty for any share of admiration they might inspire. The apartments were large and well proportioned, but not exactly according to modern notions of comfort. The outside of the building struck the passing traveller with awe and a gloomy kind of admiration; the inside caused a sort of shuddering, as if suddenly chilled. Such was the sensation which the surprised Elizabeth ac-

knowledged, as Arlingham ushered her into a large, magnificent, heavy-looking saloon, and wished her joy of becoming mistress of Westhaven Park.

The day was cold and lowering; and autumn, far advanced, was just lingering on the borders of winter.

The old housekeeper, uncertain of the actual moment of their arrival, and aware of her master's general aversion to a wasteful expenditure of firing, had kept a very frugal fire, just ready to be *blown* into a blaze when the travellers should appear.

Elizabeth had understood from Arlingham himself, and from lady Cotman, that Westhaven House was old-fashioned and somewhat gloomy; and indeed, since Miss Cotman had lost all hopes of ever becoming its mistress, *she* had represented the place altogether as the most hideous and sombre den imaginable—a sort of painting which the more fortunate Miss Vernon set down rather too entirely to the account of envy. The account, indeed,

rather gave her pleasure, as affording a greater scope for her own taste in the new furniture and decorations which she projected. In imagination, she beheld the long narrow windows, in their deep square recesses, give place to the elegant French *fenêtres*, opening into a light veranda. The dark wainscot and the old tapestry could easily be removed, and replaced by crimson cloth and costly mirrors; the furniture, she supposed, must be old-fashioned, for she had always heard that the late Mrs. Arlingham was a very retired, unfashionable, good sort of nobody; but whatever she had expected was certainly far exceeded by the reality; and when Mr. Arlingham congratulated her on her arrival at the seat of his forefathers, she was too much overwhelmed with astonishment, very nearly allied to a *shock*, to reply exactly as he expected.

"For Heaven's sake, don't keep me freezing here," said she, "but take me to some habitable room, where there is fire enough to thaw my half-frozen blood."

Mr. Arlingham was thunderstruck, and letting her hand fall from his arm, he walked forward, in a very stately manner, to a window, whilst his wife, wrapping herself in her thick shawl, peevishly ordered Mrs. Lowther, the housekeeper, to make up an immense fire.

Althea, at once grieved and provoked at her sister's folly, endeavoured to open her eyes to the consequences, by pointing out her husband's evident discomposure.

Elizabeth looked at him, and struck with a sense of her own ill behaviour, was rising to approach and apologize, when her brother called Arlingham away to look at a horse which had fallen lame. Elizabeth sat down again, half sullen, half vexed, and reading her sister's sentiments in her eyes, and dreading the rebuke she was so conscious of deserving, she begged Althea to spare her just then, and burst into tears of mingled regret and anger. The fact was, Elizabeth had now begun to discover that Mr. Arlingham was not exactly the husband she had fondly expected, nor one

at all likely to comply with all the changes she had been so long meditating. She had gradually been relinquishing in her own mind many of the more expensive alterations she once dared to think of, but still she anticipated some, and certainly expected to find that a much greater degree of fashion and comfort might be found than was really the case. She looked round and saw nothing but the lumber of years, carefully kept, and frequently skilfully repaired, but nothing that could satisfy a young and modish wife. The magnitude of her wants and wishes at once struck her eyes, and the improbability of ever attaining them her mind.

Arlingham himself had always thought so highly of every thing belonging to his family, that *he* had rather preferred the solid mementoes of other years, to the more evanescent ornaments of the present day, and had in consequence represented to his wife, as he himself saw them, rather than as they were, the glories of former times.

A very good dinner, rather substantial

than tasty, served on exquisite old china, and a blazing fire in the capacious brass grate, somewhat reconciled Elizabeth to her situation; and she exerted all her endeavours, and put on her sweetest smiles, to win her husband back to good-humour, in which Althea gladly joined.

"The prospect from these windows is so lovely," said Althea, "that I must regret the necessity of shutting it out. I quite long for morning to ascend that beautiful hill."

"I am very glad some part of my family can find any thing to praise," replied Mr. Arlingham—"I shall be happy to escort *you*, Miss Vernon, to any part of my favourite walks. It is natural I should be attached to this place, for my ancestors built and beautified it, and its antiquity is a proof of its respectability. My mother, a lady of great beauty and elegance, always resided here, and contrived to keep herself from freezing even in this very room, and in many a dreary winter."

"These rooms are, however, better calculated for summer than winter, certainly," said Althea, "for they are of a prodigious magnitude, and I own I always feel that wainscotted rooms are cold. Besides, I really grudge the absence of the fascinating scenery."

"So do I," said Elizabeth, who had several times spoken unattended to; "I think the views appear delightful; but I declare I feel this glowing fire and this excellent soup, much more enlivening and restorative after my journey than the finest green hills, and this old china almost as well worth looking at. I never beheld such china in my life; I conclude this is an heirloom, Charles?"

Next to his family and his family estate, Mr. Arlingham prized this old china, and had actually written to order his housekeeper to serve up the first dinner his wife ate in her own house on this valuable treasure.

This fortunate observation of Elizabeth's had much more effect on his sullen tem-

per than her smiles, and he turned his eyes with a very gracious expression from her to his china—"Yes, it is exquisitely fine, *my dear*," said he, "and has been in my family for many generations, and I believe every piece unbroken. I hope it will descend uninjured to my children's children. You have a taste this way, have you?"

Elizabeth, glad to be restored to favour on such easy terms, avowed a passion for old china, though she had never given the subject a moment's thought before; and Mr. Arlingham expatiated with delight on the quantity he possessed of this valuable commodity, and the pains he and his mother had taken in former times to arrange a great deal of it in the most beautiful forms, several presses of which he promised to shew the ladies on the following day.

Elizabeth's regrets were all renewed when she and Althea retired to their bedchambers, where the old-fashioned bed-

steads, with high canopies and dark velvet hangings, looked more dreary than any other part of the household furniture.

"Lord! Althea, did you ever behold such an assemblage of rubbish in your life?" asked Mrs. Arlingham—"How am I ever to live in the midst of it? and what eloquence of mine will avail in procuring a change? Yet a thorough change I must and will have, that's certain."

"I am sure your usual style of persuasion, if *persuasion* you call it, will never do," replied Althea. "I do not myself believe that Arlingham will consent to half the innovations you talk of, and certainly I think you had better begin your requests sparingly and *coaxingly*."

"What an abominable thing it is, Althea, that a man's temper never can be known, or even guessed at, before marriage! Who could have supposed that Charles was really so unaccommodating a creature?—so lately married too!"

Althea smiled significantly—"I wonder," said she, "whether Arlingham ever

makes a similar remark. But to tell you the truth, I never did believe he was a very pliant youth, nor did I expect much more compliance than you have found. He is not a particularly wise man, and not the less obstinate for that. He is not liberal; and having been so many years accustomed to see his mother satisfied with every thing about her, he does not exactly understand why you should object to the same objects which gave her abundant delight. I am much mistaken, too, if Mr. Arlingham ever forgets that *his* wife had no fortune, and therefore ought to have no ideas separate from the husband who raised her to affluence. You have an arduous task before you, my dear sister, and you must play your part with great delicacy to play it successfully. You must not rush at once into the multitude of demands you meditate making, and you must preface your wish of altering one thing by your admiration of another."

"Ah! the old china for instance—How

I despise such unmanly fiddle-de-dee sort of pleasures! And to tell you the truth, Althea, I do not admire the system of cringing, and flattering, even a husband, to gain one's own ends, and I am a little surprised that you do."

"What can you do? If you can set yourself down here, contented with what you find, you will not require any exertion of this system; but if you are determined upon alteration, surely persuasion is preferable to violence, even if they were equally efficacious. Altercation is so distressing and so disgraceful, that the flattery which might be reprehensible in any other situation of life is praiseworthy if it preserves unity between married folks. Besides, if *you* deride the puerile tastes of your husband, how can you expect other people will respect them? I do not mean to flatter you, when I say that your understanding is so superior to Arlingham's, that it is in your power to give him consequence by adopting his tastes, and making it appear that he follows your lead, where

these tastes are not exactly such as a more manly mind would approve. However, it is so impossible to give particular advice upon general rules, that I must leave you to your own judgment, and trust your success to the influence which mildness and persuasion will ever add to the beauty of a young wife."

Mr. Arlingham's step was heard in the gallery, and Althea hastily retreated to her own apartment.

CHAPTER IX.

The lady thus address'd her spouse—
What a mere dungeon is this house!
By no means large enough; and was it,
Yet this dull room, and that dark closet,
Those hangings with their worn-out faces,
Long beards, long noses, and pale faces,
Are such an antiquated scene,
They overwhelm me with the spleen. COWPER.

THE breakfast-table was very harmoniously attended the following morning; and the day proving very wet, was pronounced by Mr. Arlingham a very proper one for his exhibition of old china, and he expressed himself, upon the whole, rather glad that the weather had so entirely promoted his purpose.

Elizabeth's aim was to please and keep him in good-humour; and stealing an arch glance at Althea, and shrugging her

shoulders unobserved, she professed her willingness to be introduced to the society of teapots, vases, and jars, of which her husband was so enamoured. She behaved extremely well through the whole show, admired and exclaimed (for herself) very judiciously, for she fixed upon the very groups upon which he most prided himself; and, to crown the whole, she professed her belief that the late Mrs. Arlingham must have been a very clever woman, and possessed of a very correct and judicious taste. The survey of the china was followed by that of the whole house; and Elizabeth, whilst she praised the size and goodness of the apartments, and the beauty of prospect which every window displayed, could not help, now and then, throwing in a hint of improvement in the range of furniture and decoration.

To these hints Mr. Arlingham was perfectly silent, but he did not look displeased; and Althea looking significantly at her sister, whilst she gave her hand an em-

phatic pressure, checked the angry sensations which her rising colour bespoke in danger of breaking forth. A few sentences of disapprobation nevertheless shewed themselves perforce, as she glanced round on the heavy chairs which filled the grand saloon, and which really taxed her strength to move. The costly mirrors, in frames of immense magnitude, family pictures of old gentlemen in flowing wigs, with one hand in the breeches pocket, and the other spread out, with one foot advanced—and simpering dames in stiff satins, with long waists, and bosoms up to their chins, with long ruffles and an open fan—a wide, high chimney, and a forlorn-looking grate, with a low brass fender, and a cumbrous settee at each end of the room—such was the apartment in which Elizabeth was to receive her company, herself the greatest contrast to the whole; and Althea hardly wondered that she condemned it without reserve, though without anger. Still Mr. Arlingham said nothing, and Elizabeth's temper was al-

most exhausted, when he was fortunately called away, and the two sisters retreated to Althea's dressing-room, to talk over the horrible places they had been inspecting.

"So this is what people call marrying well, I suppose," said Elizabeth, at once discarding the smiles she had with difficulty thus long preserved.

"And is it not?" replied Althea—"Can the mere incumbrance of old-fashioned furniture, and a Gothic mansion, destroy at once the substantial comforts of a good fortune, a lovely situation, and a husband without vices, though not wholly without errors? My dear Elizabeth, be less fastidious—be less inclined to cavil at trifles, and more disposed to acknowledge the thousand blessings your situation confers upon yourself, and enables you to bestow on others."

"Pray, when you enumerate my advantages, don't forget the conversational powers of my husband," said Mrs. Arlingham, sarcastically.—"How eloquently did

he expatiate on the charms of his shells and jars!—How complacently did he incline his ear to the sound of his bowls of tone dragon, as he rung their changes! However, all that I could excuse, for I never supposed him a man of extraordinary erudition, if he would but let me enjoy my taste as much as he does his own. How can I receive my friends in that immense cave, furnished as it now is? Consider how impossible it is to hear people speak across the room, and how almost equally impossible it is to move the chairs to any neighbourhood with each other. How Philipson would laugh and quiz me!"

"Recollect how you laughed and quizzed him for having such prim little painted chairs, with bamboo seats, which you insisted upon not being able to bear the weight of any thing heavier than a feather. As to your own, which I acknowledge would be amply sufficient for the rotundity of sir Thomas Cotman himself, you have, fortunately, footmen to lift

them about for you. But, trifling apart, let me conjure you not to make these things a matter of consequence to your own feelings, or of dispute with Arlingham. He will never be driven or teazed into any measure, depend upon it; but I think he may be persuaded. As to what people will say, that is really so weak an argument, that if I did not know how dangerous a weapon ridicule is, even in the hands of simpletons, I should not notice it. But of this you may be sure, that *people* will not accuse *you* of the want of elegant and fashionable ideas—that great responsibility will attach to Arlingham, and he alone will be blamed."

"But that is very unpleasant," answered Mrs. Arlingham—"I wish him to be admired and respected, and should suffer myself, to know that people ridiculed him."

"With those sentiments, my dear Elizabeth, I am perfectly satisfied. If you fear the laugh of the world on your husband's account, I am persuaded your own

manners towards him will be what they ought to be, since if you do not *appear*, at least, to respect him, rest assured no one else will. However a woman may shine at her husband's expence in the eyes of fools, she pays the price of the approbation of the wise."

Elizabeth's faults were those of a too hasty temper, not of a defective heart or understanding. In marrying so much above herself, she believed she had secured every earthly good; and seeing Arlingham a man of fashionable manners, and stylish appearance in himself, she had not anticipated so great a contrast in his establishment. She acknowledged the justice of Althea's reasoning, and felt her own folly; and took her place at the head of her table with gay and easy smiles. Arlingham was in high good-humour, and every thing passed off smoothly. A pleasant hour after dinner enticed them into the park, and here Elizabeth had no occasion to *assume* a tone of approbation, for the scenery was delightful. The varie-

gated hues of latter autumn were rich and highly picturesque; a murmuring waterfall, and a richly-toned Eolian harp in a summer-house window, joined with the melody of a thousand birds; and the western sky streamed with the luxuriant brightness of a setting September sun.

The scene diffused a serene cheerfulness through the breast of each spectator, and induced from each to all a sentiment of tenderness and good-will. The departing sun warned them, however, that the evening air blew chill, and they returned to the house. Arlingham drew one of the ponderous settees round to the fire, and laughed, for the first time, at its magnitude. Elizabeth laughed too, and conquered the inclination which at first assailed her, of catching at so good an opening to propose a reform. Althea took up the novel of Camilla, and proposed reading aloud; George Vernon leaned back in one corner of the settee; and Arlingham readily offered his hands to hold some

netting-silk his wife was beginning to wind.

Supper interrupted the placid scene; but after they had dismissed the sandwich-tray, Mr. Arlingham turned to Elizabeth, and said—"I have been thinking, my dear, that though this heavy style of magnificence was very well for my mother, yet it appears rather out of character for young folks like ourselves. I do not, however, intend to new-model the whole house, but I think you shall write for a new drawing-room suit, and dining-room also; and I think two spare bedrooms shall be more modernly furnished. I am not willing to do too much at once, but we can always add, you know, if we find it necessary. What would you like for the drawing-room?"

Nothing could exceed Elizabeth's astonishment at this arrangement, except the delight which it inspired. She gaily kissed her husband's cheek, and thanked him with all her heart for this kind con-

sideration of her wishes; and greatly did she now rejoice that she had left the proposal to come entirely from himself.

The discussion of tastes and opinions followed; and Althea, with all the pleasure of a good heart, entered into the arguments for and against this or that different mode or colour. Scarlet cloth and black velvet trimmings were at last fixed on for the dining-room, with appropriate furniture; but the drawing-room required a longer consideration.

Arlingham's mind was not a capacious one; it was better calculated for the furnishing an apartment than discussing the affairs of the nation, or the enjoyment of literature.

Of this Elizabeth was well aware, and believing she should lose nothing of elegance and fashion in her rooms by entrusting the whole business to him at once, she paid him the acceptable compliment of leaving the arrangement of her drawing-room to his taste.

He set about the business with all the

importance of a man engaged in the most momentous concern. He was, however, so really desirous of thoroughly pleasing his wife, that he took Althea into all his consultations, and they very gravely entered into a laborious discussion on draperies, &c.; and though Althea could not avoid detecting the vacancy of Arlingham's mind, she rejoiced to discover a goodness of heart, which, by proper and indulgent management, might be generally directed to desirable purposes.

CHAPTER X.

I will not be slack
To play my part in fortune's pageant.

SHAKESPEARE.

THE taste and celerity of London workmen were never more conspicuous than in the rapid change they effected, in consequence of Mr. Arlingham's hurrying

orders, at Westhaven. Once resolved to oblige his wife, he gave himself no time for thoughts which might bring repentance, or at least regret, with them.

The *gentleman* upholsterer came over in a postchaise—waggons laden with elegancies followed; and the grand saloon soon became the repository of more articles of furniture than Elizabeth could find either names or uses for.

Althea's address saved her sister from the mortification of exposing her ignorance to the consequential tradesman, and they wandered together through the splendid *confusion* which constitutes the *arrangement* of a fashionable apartment. Arlingham astonished Mr. Barton by requiring an immediate account of the attendant expence; and in spite of all the obsequious requests of the furnishing gentleman, that he might be allowed the honour of seeing Mr. Arlingham's name in his books, he chose to pay for every thing on the spot, and took especial care to claim every deduction allowed to a ready-

money customer. Mrs. Arlingham sighed, as she looked from the modern elegance of her magnificent saloon to the still dreary and ancient lumber which filled her common sitting-rooms, and which appeared more than ever frightful from the contrast, and from the conviction she felt, that she had now gained the utmost point of indulgence in that way; she was, however, very grateful, and very much delighted with what she had gained, and too politic to shew she wished for more. She arranged the despised furniture as well as she could, and looked forward to the following Sunday with great satisfaction, which was to be the signal that her house was ready for the reception of the neighbouring families. Eagerly this signal was obeyed; and Elizabeth was soon gratified by seeing her door thronged with equipages, and hearing encomiums on her elegant taste, in the choice of her new decorations, the credit of which she rather blushed as she gave to her husband. Visits followed calls—and Westhaven and its

vicinity resounded with gaiety. To do Arlingham justice, however economical he might be on common occasions, he certainly gave very handsome entertainments, when he did fall into an extravagance of that kind; and Elizabeth had the satisfaction of presiding at a table covered with delicacies, served up in massy gilt plate, and the most superb china, cut-glass, &c. which, though not modern, were too substantially good and beautiful not to be admired; but these bridal galas over, Arlingham began to hint at expence, and his dislike of a life of bustle and visiting; and winter now drawing rapidly on, Elizabeth the more readily complied with his wishes to remain more at home, particularly as she had a scheme in her head, to fill her house with staying company at Christmas — a scheme, however, of which her husband at present was quite ignorant.

Amongst those families whose very respectable appearance at church had led Elizabeth to expect the compliment of a

call, was one group, consisting of a gentleman and lady, three daughters, and two young men, whom she supposed to be the sons. She had been much struck by the singular propriety and gentility of their dress and manners, had inquired their name, and learnt from Arlingham, with no small suffusion on his cheek at the same moment, that they were called Panton. In vain she had looked, amongst the gay parties who called to congratulate and to criticise, for this family; they came not; and when all expectation of seeing them at Westhaven was over, though they still appeared *regularly* at church, and sometimes met her in her walks and rides, she mentioned to Arlingham her wonder, that they alone, of all the genteel people in the neighbourhood, had absented themselves.

Arlingham looked rather silly, and tried to turn the conversation; but Elizabeth still continued to urge it, and at length learned that a most vexatious lawsuit at that moment pended between the two

parties, in consequence of a prosecution, begun in a moment of anger, on Arlingham's part, against Frank Panton, the second son, for shooting without a licence. In vain Mr. Panton had offered every conciliating apology. Arlingham was beyond measure tenacious of his game, even to qualified sportsmen; and Mr. Panton, who could ill spare his money, was obliged to pay the penalty. The too common feeling, that revenge is sweet, prompted Panton to retaliate; and a small field, separating the two estates, and equally valuable to each, became the subject of litigation, Mr. Panton having unfortunately discovered that some words in an obscure deed might be wrested into a sort of acknowledgment of his right. Expence now became an object of subordinate care, and to deprive Arlingham of this possession the first wish of his life. A tolerable share of rancour marked the proceedings on both sides; and nothing could be more offensive to Arlingham than to hear any of the family mentioned.

Elizabeth, to whom every species of quarrelling was hateful (excepting, perhaps, those little disputes with her husband which were *intended* to confirm her own supremacy), endeavoured to argue the irritated Arlingham into a more Christian-like frame of mind; but she found with grief that Arlingham was of a litigious quarrelsome temper, delighting in law, and that a shooting-season seldom passed by without two or three prosecutions against his neighbours. Already he and his gamekeeper had been engaged in several disputes; and the sound of a gun drew him continually from the fireside, in the worst weather, to endeavour at detecting the culprit. Elizabeth, who had fancied several of the gentlemen very cold in their manner to Arlingham, and backward in accepting his invitations to Westhaven, wondered at it no longer; but she bitterly deplored the cause, and wished she had married, like Isabella, in a more humble, but far more happy situation. Determined, however, to shew that she

shared not in the unenviable feelings of her husband, she always made a point of returning the bows of the Mr. Pantons and the smiling curtsies of the ladies, with more warmth and cordiality than those of any other person, to the great annoyance of Arlingham, who generally complained of such conduct in no very placid terms, and in spite of Althea's remonstrances, who augured the worst effects from such a mode of behaviour. Elizabeth either pouted or laughed, according to her own humour; and Althea, to whom the daily bickerings (for they could not be actually called quarrels) became more and more painful, at length determined to accept Mrs. Charlton's repeated invitations, and accompany her to London for the winter, again postponing her intended visit to Isabella till spring. Elizabeth expostulated.

"Why will you leave me? indeed how can you," said she, "seeing how much I want your advice, Althea? I err continu-

ally, even with you at my side; how then do you imagine I can go on as I ought when you desert me?"

"Elizabeth," replied Althea, very gravely, "you are so much older than myself, that I never offer advice without feeling that I am impertinent, and though you repeatedly ask for it, your total disregard shews its futility. Could I, by remaining longer here, save you from the unhappiness I see too clearly you are preparing for yourself, most willingly would I stay; but I can do no good; and indeed I am not certain but that, once left to your own entire management, you may be tempted to think more for yourself, and not hazard disagreements which my little influence can no longer be exerted to counteract."

"But, good Heaven! Althea, who can bear such a quarrelsome, litigious, sordid temper as the man's I have to deal with? He frightens away all my friends and acquaintance, and absolutely prevents my knowing the very family whom of all others I most wish to visit."

"And why so? They appear very pleasing, I allow; but that *comfortable* spirit of opposition, so unfortunately implanted in *most* minds, alone makes them seem doubly desirable, because to you unattainable. Arlingham is, unluckily, not popular, for his habits are not those of conciliation, and, consequently, those with whom he is at variance are more apt to be pitied and over-rated, whilst he is, perhaps, undeservedly blamed."

"But is it not hard, very hard, that I, whose habits were always so far removed from any thing like disputing, should be thus tied for life to such a quarrelsome creature?"

Althea smiled a little archly.—"How far you may claim any merit for good-humour, in a situation which never offered any inducement to a contrary conduct, I know not; but surely you will not boast of too much forbearance now. In a word, my dear sister, you are playing most dangerously with your own peace, in thus

continually thwarting, or even arguing with Arlingham. If he be quarrelsome, he does not seem disposed to be so with you. You have no pretext for interfering in his disputes with others, for I am persuaded his temper will never be improved by such means, nor will you serve those with whom he is at variance, by taking their part against him. You saw, in the instance of your saloon, what power you do possess, when properly and kindly exerted; why then try any other?"

"But I am so persuaded that he treated those Pantons very ill, that I must take *their* part—I cannot bear they should fancy I am prejudiced against them, for every body speaks of them so highly, and I am so desirous of at last reconciling matters between them and Arlingham."

"At the expence of your own quiet?" said Althea, reproachfully: "well, you must act as you please, but I must do the same; and as I find I cannot do any good by staying, I must be allowed to accept Mrs. Charlton's invitation; and I shall ac-

cordingly write to-day, and invite her, with your leave, to come for me whenever it suits her. I will come again to you, however, whenever I can do any real good; but do not send for me upon every frivolous dispute, of which you have so many—Remember, Elizabeth, though I call them, as in themselves separately they are, *frivolous*, they become, in the aggregate, dreadfully and fatally serious."

Three days after this conversation, Mrs. Charlton arrived at Westhaven, and such was the effect Althea's advice had at the time on her sister, that during that lady's continuance there, all was peace and harmony; and Mrs. Charlton really left them impressed with an idea that they had conquered the little asperities she had so much deplored, and adopted the only method of securing conjugal happiness—mutual forbearance.

CHAPTER XI.

For hear me, Hero, wooing, wedding, and repenting, is as a Scotch jig, a measure, and a cinque-a-pace: the first suit is hot and hasty, like a Scotch jig, and full as fantastical; the wedding, mannerly-modest, as a measure, full of state and ancientry; and then comes repentance, and with his bad legs falls into the cinque-a-pace, faster and faster, 'till he sinks into his grave. SHAKESPEARE.

THE parting between the sisters was very painful to both, for Elizabeth was well aware of the influence Althea's more placid and considerate temper had on her own hasty one, and likewise on Arlingham, who frequently relinquished a mean sordid plan, because he was ashamed she should witness it. He pressed her very cordially to return speedily to Westhaven, and actually presented her with a five-pound note, a present which she would

willingly have returned, but from the fear of disobliging him.

The travellers found no inducement on the road to tempt them to prolong their journey, but made their way rapidly to the small, but elegant house of Mrs. Charlton, in Beaumont-street, where Althea was immediately conducted to a most comfortable suite of apartments, which she was desired to consider exclusively her own. It was really a relief to a mind like Althea's, so full of all the mild and placid virtues, to find her days undisturbed by caprice or wrangling, and to live without the constant fear of hearing two persons, who ought to conciliate each other, eternally snapping and thwarting. She longed to see how Isabella and Philipson conducted themselves, and expected, from the well-known sweetness of Isabella's temper, a very different exhibition of married life from that she had witnessed at Westhaven. Mrs. Charlton promised to take her to Feltham Vicarge early in the spring; and desiring her in the mean-

time to make herself easy about her sisters, and enjoy the novel pleasures of a London winter, she amply provided her with the means, and set her the example by her own cheerful participation—soberly.

Mrs. Charlton's acquaintance was very select, and of course not very extensive. She had no saving clause for high-bred vice, nor did she disdain humble virtue.

Her own manners, at once easy, correct, and always cheerful, intimidated the vicious, and inspired the good with confidence; and her house was the chosen resort of the gay, the young, and the amiable of both sexes, at the same time that it was the asylum of the unfortunate and the refuge of the unhappy. Do not let it be inferred from this that Mrs. Charlton was a methodistical woman, averse to gaiety and amusement—far from it. She was truly and fervently religious; and she best shewed the true nature of religion, by its cheerful influence on her spirits and temper. She had not passed through her youth without many and very severe

trials; but the God in whom she trusted had assisted her through them; and though she had not ceased to remember and to feel, she grieved, if she still did grieve, in solitude.—"I have no right," she would say, "to vex or trouble others with my sorrowful feelings. A little exertion will bear me through the hours I must give to society, and there are always times of retirement for the indulgence of melancholy emotions, without damping the spirits of those around us."

All this required an effort; but Mrs. Charlton was equal to any thing which made others happy, though at the expence of her own feelings at the time.

Althea, to whom London itself was a novelty, and a source of continual pleasure and surprise, found infinite amusement even in the mere change of scene which her windows supplied, and scarcely wished, during the day, for a more varied enjoyment; whilst, in the evening, Mrs. Charlton drew round her a circle, where

ennui was never known. A violent cold, caught during the journey from Westhaven Park, had hitherto prevented her going to any public places; but as soon as she was quite recovered, she made a point of taking Althea to the theatres, &c. and of course her pleasures were increased, if not her happiness—two words which she had learnt to consider as not synonymous.

It was impossible that a young woman with so much discernment and reflection as Althea Vernon possessed, could avoid making certain comparisons upon the different degrees and kinds of comfort enjoyed by married and single persons.

"I begin to suspect you of a design, my dear friend," said she to Mrs. Charlton, one morning.

"I have a great many designs and schemes, I honestly confess," replied that lady, "but none which can be inimical to your happiness. Of what do you suspect me?"

"Of an intention to frighten me from the dangers of married life, by shewing

me all the independence and enjoyment of celibacy. Who that lives with you, and observes the complete power you possess of pleasing yourself, would be so silly as to marry? You put me in mind of the centurion, in the scriptures—'I say to this man, go, and he goeth;' and I cannot help glancing back a recollection or two at Westhaven, which certainly do not heighten my predilection for matrimony, particularly when opposed to all I see here."

"You must not draw your conclusions so hastily," replied Mrs. Charlton, "nor suffer one or two examples, on either side of the question, to determine your opinion. I am myself inclined to give the preference to a single life, on the great point of happiness, as far as I am myself concerned; but I dare not pronounce upon it generally. I, you know, am rich, independent of the world, and able, from particular circumstances, to act exactly as I please—this I could not do as a married woman; and having been so long in the

habit of consulting myself only, I believe I could not have been happy under any restraint. But you must not take me for a general example of single blessedness. I am afraid it is by no means a state of comfort to many, who, poor, friendless, and unconnected, pass through life, vainly wishing for the endearing ties of kindred, and the attentions of affectionate connexions. At your age, my dear Althea, I did not think of being an old maid, nor should I have liked the idea; but we none of us know the destiny in store for us, fortunately for ourselves—I am now perfectly satisfied with mine, and willing to acknowledge the infinite wisdom and goodness I can now see conspicuous in it."

"I should like to know the particulars of your history, my dear Mrs. Charlton," answered Althea, as she traced the marks of painful remembrance on her friend's pale cheek, and marked her tearful eyes.

"Some evening, when you and I are *tête-à-tête*, I will indulge you," said Mrs. Charlton, sighing; "but it must be un-

premeditated. I could not sit down to give a regular history of misery, which, though I have ceased to suffer from, I can never cease to remember with some degree of pain, though no longer with wretchedness."

"If it occasions you one pang to relate your former distresses, I will not suffer you to encounter it for me," said Althea, affectionately; "and I beg you will forget the indiscreet wish I uttered and repent of."

"No, my dear, these recollections are now pleasant, and mournful to the soul, and I have no objection to revive them. We will now wave the subject. Let me, however, recommend to you not to draw general conclusions from particular situations. I am a happier woman single than I should have been married; but I question if old maids in general think a single life the happiest, though I firmly believe there are few married women who would not gladly exchange the conjugal yoke for the power of pleasing themselves uncon-

trolled: neither draw your ideas of wedded happiness from the skirmishing kind of life you witnessed at Westhaven. I hope you will receive a very different impression of matrimony at Feltham Vicarage, and prove, by-and-by, in your own person, that marriage *may* be a state of supreme and superior felicity."

"That is all in good time, ten years hence, in my opinion," replied Althea.

"At present, I think you are certainly better as you are," Mrs. Charlton answered. "I am apt to think that half the miserable marriages we see are in consequence of people marrying too young, particularly in middling life, and more especially on the part of the woman. She becomes a wife without an idea of its duties, and with the expectation of a continuance of all those indulgences to which she has been accustomed under her parent's roof. She finds too soon that her husband cannot perhaps afford these things, even if he wished to do it—she is hurried to a dull village, where she finds none of

the pleasures she anticipated—is thrown into society of which she had no previous idea; and most probably finds none of the sympathy in her disappointed feelings which she expected from her husband, who, in his turn, is equally disappointed; and under these circumstances, she loses both her temper and her spirits. I would therefore have a woman see and know something more of the world and its pleasures than mere theory, before she renounces them for the fatigues and confinement of a family, or is snatched from them, just as she begins to taste them, by necessity or caprice. I would have no woman in mediocrity marry before she is five-and-twenty. With respect to high life, it is very different, at least as marriages in high life are conducted now.—I suspect, my dear, you have had a treatise on matrimony sufficiently long and tiresome," added Mrs. Charlton, rising—"It is now time to prepare for our visit to Mrs. Sedley. You require a relaxation after such a prosing sermon."

"I think the Sedleys always appear so happy, that I quite love to go there," replied Althea. "I admire Mr. Sedley, he is so good-humoured and so attentive to her. He *must* be a good husband."

Mrs. Charlton smiled, but made no reply; and the ladies retired to dress.

CHAPTER XII.

Now near thy long home to be rank'd with the shades,
Give over to frisk it with buxom young maids;
And, furrow'd with wrinkles, profanely to shroud
Those bright constellations with age's dark cloud.

FRANCIS'S *Horace.*

THE parties which met at Mr. Sedley's house in Albemarle-street were always pleasant, for Mr. Sedley was the most delightful man in the world. Such was the character which superficial observation gave him, and which his gay and elegant manners seemed to authorize. Sensible,

well-informed, and animated, always ready to promote gaiety, he was of course a general favourite with the young; whilst the elders admired that, with so gay a turn, and such generally-pleasing manners, he was the most attentive man possible to his wife; and, for a man of his fortune and brilliant habits, very domestic.

Althea thought of him as the world seemed agreed to think in common, and wondered how any woman, blest with such a husband, could be so grave, and sometimes she fancied so cross, as Mrs. Sedley.

The party of this evening was more than usually animated, and Mr. Sedley, gallant and attentive to every body, more than usually pleasing—"I'm so glad this fair novice in fashionable life has at last so favourable an opportunity of seeing something more brilliant than a dull play or more stupid opera," said he to Mrs. Charlton, as he led Althea up to her, with an evident intention of proposing some very pleasant plan; "I have been so fortunate

as to procure tickets for lady Cremone's splendid masquerade, and you must allow Mrs. Sedley the pleasure of conducting Miss Vernon thither, for I dare not ask *you* to be her chaperon."

"I shall not go, Mr. Sedley," said his wife, with a melancholy tone, and a very grave face.

"Pho! nonsense! you do not feel well to-day, and are consequently in the dismals," Mr. Sedley replied, playfully touching her cheek. "Do you know, Miss Vernon," he added, with the fondest and pleasantest air imaginable, "do you know I am sometimes obliged to be quite peremptory with this little wife of mine, and force her into gaiety, or she would immure herself in the nursery. We have had a hard battle this very morning, upon the subject of a theatre in miniature I want to build at Farnham. Matilda dislikes the thing, but I, as I ought, carried the day, and she shall yet perform—no, don't let it be *Mrs. Sullen*, Matilda."

Althea could not exactly comprehend

all this, but she was persuaded that more "was meant than met the ear." Such, however, was her admiration of Mr. Sedley, and her opinion of his kindness to his wife, that she was more inclined than ever to blame her for her gloomy opposition to his wishes, than him for inattention to her feelings. To his proposal of taking her to the masquerade in question, Althea was decidedly averse. She had no wish to go to a scene described by all modern novelists, even to a disgusting repetition, and from which all those participators in real life whom she had met with turned with disappointed satiety.

Mr. Sedley looked vexed, and she thought displeased, whilst his wife smiled, and exclaimed—"Then now *I* need not go?"

"You must please yourself, I suppose," he said, and was turning away; but recovering in a moment the self-possession he had so nearly lost, he said to Mrs. Charlton —"Well, but my dear madam, if Miss Vernon is so determined against the mas-

querade, I trust you will accompany her to Farnham, when the theatre is completed. Do not cruelly thwart me every way."

"My acceptance of your invitation will come time enough when the theatre really *is* finished, I suppose," replied Mrs. Charlton, smiling; "and knowing you as well as I do, I do not expect to be summoned to Farnham at present."

"You are too severe," said Mr. Sedley: "it shall be finished, and I will be master of half a score different characters in less than three weeks—I will begin to study them to-morrow."

"I wish," said Mrs. Charlton, in a low earnest voice, "I wish you would study your own, and profit by the study."

Althea did not hear Mrs. Charlton's words, but she observed that Sedley turned on his heel with an air of pique, and a tolerable suffusion on his face, and she concluded he was not much pleased with their import. The next moment the sound of violins and a pipe and tabor gave notice of a dance, and she observed Sedley

gaily whisk round a very singular-looking lady, and go off with her in a dancing step to the next room. A gentleman immediately came up to solicit Althea's hand, and on joining the set she saw Sedley, laughing and good-humoured, as if he had never been offended—a circumstance which convinced her he must be the best-tempered creature breathing. Mrs. Charlton suffered her to make these remarks without comment or contradiction.

The lady with whom Sedley had so unceremoniously danced off struck Althea as the most curious-looking woman she had ever seen. Miss Preston, which she found was her name, appeared, from her dress and manner, to be about eighteen—from her face and figure, on the wrong side of forty. Her dark wig was curled so judiciously as to conceal the invidious *crow's feet* at the corner of her eyes from transient beholders; but a deep line at the top of the nose, and a certain tremulous quivering of the cheeks in talking, betrayed her secret. Her throat and bosom, wholly ex-

posed to view, were coarse, red, and wrinkled, though, as a wit observed, "she had done her best to gather her wrinkles together, and confine them with a mock cornelian necklace," which "best of imitations" likewise adorned her *rosy* arms. A pair of paste ear-rings glittered in her ears; a very scanty dress of dirty blue crape shewed the bad proportions of her figure, and very short petticoats displayed a silk stocking, not *many* times worn since the last mangling, She laughed and talked very gaily to the men, who had gathered round, evidently only to quiz her. To the ladies she curtsied, made fine speeches, and presented her ungloved hands, loaded with trumpery rings. Her style of dancing she meant for the extreme of animation, and nearly sent her knees through her petticoats.

"Don't you admire my choice of a partner?" said Sedley, in a low whisper to Althea—"She may thank Mrs. Charlton for catching me, I promise her, for really that good old virgin gave me such a by-

lecture, that I was covered with confusion, and caught at any thing to relieve it, and that chanced to be Miss Preston—good luck for Judy, I think."

"Is she young?" inquired Althea.

"Young!" replied Sedley, laughing; "I should think she may perhaps be three years younger than Mrs. Charlton, and not more. Look at the two, and see how they bear a comparison. I owe your friend a grudge, I acknowledge, but can one help contrasting the plain, respectable, becoming style of real gentility and propriety in her dress and manners, and the tawdry, trumpery, affected juvenility of Miss Preston's? We feel persuaded that the one is younger than she appears, and the other endeavours to hide, under all this frippery and levity, more years than perhaps really belong to her. Mrs. Charlton is an unmarried woman, contented with her situation, to which she does honour; Miss Preston is an old maid, heartily tired of her cruel lot, and ready to exchange the dis-

graceful epithet as soon as she can meet with a man charitably inclined."

"I do not give you credit for much charity of any kind," said Althea; "I never heard so ill-natured a philippic, nor can your praise of my friend reconcile me to it."

"Then why do not women dress and behave as they ought? Men will make remarks, and those not charitable ones, when *old girls* thus forget themselves, their age, and pretensions. Poor Preston! she, I'm sure, possesses a most enlarged and universal charity, for she professes to love all her own sex, but she *dotes* upon ours."

"Pray what did Mrs. Charlton say to occasion such a vertigo in your brain, which caused so much *good luck* to Miss Preston?" said Althea.

"I admire the lurking sarcasm that question contains," replied Sedley, laughing and colouring: "Excuse me, however; I must keep my own secrets as long as I

can, and you are one of the very last I should wish to find them out."

"What is all this whispering about?" inquired Miss Preston, affectedly tapping Sedley's arm with a fan—"I do not allow any body to whisper my partners but myself; and now I think of it, I remember I have a secret to tell you, Mr. Sedley —Oh! not at that distance; you must come quite near."

Althea smiled and drew back, and Sedley, by a judicious manœuvre, joined the dancers, and escaped the secret.

CHAPTER XIII.

Dream after dream ensues,
And still they dream that they shall still succeed,
And still are disappointed. COWPER.

.....

Time, as he passes us, has a dove's wing,
Unsoil'd, and swift, and of a silken sound. IBID.

A FORTNIGHT passed on, and Althea heard no more of Farnham and the theatre, though she saw the Sedleys almost every day. This interval was marked by letters from her two sisters, which, as characteristic of their sentiments and situation, are here transcribed.

"*Westhaven Park.*

"MY DEAR ALTHEA,

"After all my fine expectations and gay anticipations of a London winter,

(for in spite of old Hurlothrumbo's declaration that he would not indulge me, I persisted in thinking he would), here I am, and here *I* am likely enough to vegetate in melancholy and profitless splendour. Arlingham is worse than ever, and is so occupied in shooting, and detecting poachers, that he has no time for any thing else, and no wish for any other society than his gamekeeper. I have petitioned and entreated *prettily*, insisted *angrily*, and argued *sturdily*, but I can neither petition, insist, nor argue to any purpose on the subject of a pleasant party at my own house, since a London jaunt is so entirely prohibited. Arlingham wants no gentlemen, he says, to whom he must give up his time, nor any ladies who will frivolously occupy all mine; and concludes by observing, that *his mother* was always happy at home and alone, always employed, and always gay. This old frump, whose ashes her dutiful son disturbs on every occasion when he can make her a pattern for me,

seems to have lived with her hands in pastry, her feet in an old pair of wooden clogs, which I am often shewn, and her few ideas immersed in herbs, preserves, and distilled waters; and truly the small portion of brains nature bestowed on her only son seem to be employed in matters very little more useful, and not so pacific. However, *madam* Arlingham, meaning my magnanimous self, my dear, is still the envy of the poor and humble, who gaze on the elegant carriage which rolls lazily through the park, and fancy the lady wrapped in 'them there beautiful furs' must be as happy as she is warm. Now and then a few noisy hunters *enliven* the scene; but, fortunately for me, they *drink too much wine* for Arlingham to invite them often. Then I have occasionally a grand melancholy party of starched *county*-folks, who sit in judgment on all they hear and see, and whose whole conversation is respecting high sheriffs, grand juries, and the last *county* ball, where they pride themselves on behaving rudely to the town fa-

milies, without whose co-operation they must have sat still, or danced with their own *kin*. And yet, amongst all this delectable dulness, I have the great satisfaction of knowing that Mr. Arlingham thinks I ought to be the happiest creature alive, because I am mistress of Westhaven Park and a coach; and my old friends about the Lea envy me for having married so uncommonly well; whilst I envy those who are not married at all, or my sister Isabella, who writes in a style of happiness which would set all grandeur at defiance.

"I perceive my letter consists principally of complaints. You will lecture me, I know, for not being able, in a situation like mine, to find something to be happy with. We don't quarrel *much*, for Arlingham comes in tired to death to a very late dinner, of which *hare* soup and *partridge* pie (for *obvious* reasons) make no inconsiderable part. Then he thinks it hardly worth opening a bottle of port or madeira for me and himself, so a few glasses of some of his 'mother's admirable cow-

slip or orange wine' conclude the *feast*, and he falls asleep on the old sofa, and I do as well as I can, and sometimes cry for spite. Such is the diary of '*Elizabeth Vernon*, who married so monstrous grand!' Should I ever have daughters, which, by-the-bye, I hope I never shall, nor sons either, but if I should be so troubled, they shall be a race of old maids, at the risk of my lasting displeasure—I would force them to be happy, in spite of themselves. Never marry, Althea; and with this piece of advice, and the ardent hope of soon seeing you, I subscribe myself,

"Your affectionate sister,

"ELIZABETH ARLINGHAM."

"*Feltham Vicarage.*

"MY DEAR ALTHEA,

"I should have written earlier in reply to your last letter, but my dear Philipson has been ill, and I had neither time nor spirits to write then. The heedless creature sprained both his ancles, in

jumping over a gate, to recover a pheasant he had shot on purpose for me, and for which he knew I had a particular fancy. This is the reason you have had so little game from us; but now he is out again you shall have more. George has been with us, and is an excellent shot; but I believe his *grand* brother-in-law, who has taught him some very *prudent* maxims, has put him into a way of making his gun pay his *shooting-expences*. He gave Philipson a hint or two on the subject, but you may guess how it was received. My mother has been a good deal with us this winter. She intended to have gone to Westhaven Park, but Elizabeth does not appear to encourage it much, probably because her husband does not. Indeed, accounts from thence are not pleasing, and my mother is very justly fearful of saying a word which might appear like interference. Elizabeth, perhaps, will not tell *you* that she has lost her *expectations* of an heir—I will not say her *hopes*, because she is delighted at the loss, and was very pee-

vish at the prospect of such an incumbrance, as *she*, very unwisely, I think, called it, notwithstanding she knew how very anxiously Arlingham desires a son. How differently people think and feel on the same subject! and how differently should she and I describe the same situation! You have promised us a visit a long time, my dear Althea, and I am every day more desirous to receive it. You do not know Philipson *at home*, and it is there he shines. I hope our kind Mrs. Charlton will soon bring you here. Elizabeth tells me she advises you in every letter to live and die unmarried. Come to the Vicarage, and then hear my advice. We have the finest sea-cale this winter, and my elder wine is delicious, which, being my first essay, I am not a little proud of. This is our constant supper; but my extravagant husband will drink his port still after dinner, though George assured him Arlingham seldom took any thing but made wines by himself. Philipson told George that the great man was welcome to drink slops as

long as he pleased, but that he did not like the plan; and truly I must own, that George seemed to like port full as well as he could have done currant, when it was not drank at his own expence. All this is trifling enough, is it not? But in this secluded spot, and at this time of the year, I have no great variety of scene or occupation to entertain you with, and I know you can enjoy and understand the trifling of a happy heart. I send you and Mrs. Charlton some of the grapes I preserved from our beautiful vine, with our united best love. Come to us soon, my Althea.

"Ever your own

"ISABELLA PHILIPSON."

These letters balanced in Althea's heart the feelings of regret and pleasure. Elizabeth's imprudent conduct she plainly saw would lead to positive misery, when Arlingham, at length tired out by complaint and invective, would shake off entirely

the little restraint in which he yet held himself. She had too often, and too ineffectually, tried advice, to believe she could do any good, either by letter or in person, or she would willingly have given up her own very pleasant engagements with Mrs. Charlton, and even her promised visit to Isabella, to go to Elizabeth. Having, however, so frequently and so vainly tried her powers of persuasion, she followed Mrs. Charlton's advice, and remained with her. To Isabella's tranquil and humble home she looked forward with delight, and believed that there, at least, she might expect to find happiness, which, in the credulity of untaught youth and ignorance of the world, she pronounced must be lasting. Mrs. Charlton smiled, but did not contradict her; and Althea replied to Isabella's little journal of felicity with congratulations on the present, and anticipations for the future. A heavier task awaited her in writing to Elizabeth, to whom she gave the counsels of prudence in the language of affection, but dared not

flatter herself with the hope of producing any good effect.

CHAPTER XIV.

People reason and repine themselves into a thousand miseries, by choosing to settle that they can only be contented one way; whereas there are fifty ways, if they could look about them, that would commonly do as well.

CECILIA.

"WELL, my dear," said Mrs. Charlton, after having read the letters which Althea shewed her, "and how stands the 'Balance of Comfort' now?"

"I think," replied Althea, "notwithstanding the pleasing picture Isabella's letter presents, I still adhere to my former opinion, and find *your* scale the heaviest. Perhaps I am presumptuous when I think that I could have been happy with Arlingham, and by different management have corrected, and in time subdued, the

errors which Elizabeth's conduct will rather increase. She has injudiciously shewn that she despises him, and he is indignant that she should presume to dictate to a husband who has raised her so much above her original situation; for certainly he thinks, with all the arrogance of wealth and a little mind, that his having given her riches and splendour ought to have purchased for himself obedience and gratitude almost to adoration. He is a kind of man who loves thanks and praises, and is pleased to be continually reminded that those whom he has obliged do not forget the favour. I feel how difficult it must be for Elizabeth, whose temper and disposition are open and liberal as the day, to live quietly with such a man, and I know how much more easily a bystander discerns the errors in a game than those who are playing it; but I think a little delicate humouring of Arlingham's foibles would have had a very salutary effect, particularly when assisted by beauty, youth, and novelty. I fear Elizabeth's power will

rapidly diminish if she does not change her system."

"And, unfortunately," said Mrs. Charlton, "that kind of influence, once lost, is never regained. I believe men never forget, and seldom forgive from the heart, offences committed against them by their wives, though they expect a very different turn of ideas from them; and thus it is that a woman's influence over her husband, once lost, is never, by any future concessions, regained in any considerable degree, particularly where that of *his* relations is allowed to preponderate, which is too often the case. When people talk of positive happiness or misery in married life, without any intermediate state of feeling, I am persuaded they are wrong. There is a gradual scale of sentiment—bliss, felicity, happiness, comfort, indifference, unhappiness, misery. Now, in my opinion, much of the *last* is incurred by girls (I say *girls*, because men are always better informed as to the real nature of conjugal feeling) insisting upon the *first*. They

despise mere comfort, and, after all, I believe that is the most easily attained; and fortunate are those couples, who in descending from the highest step, where they seldom remain even so long as the honeymoon, can stop at comfort. Elizabeth, I dare say, will go one step lower, and hit upon indifference. If Isabella descends, it will be to positive misery."

"Oh! sooner may she be removed from bliss on earth to bliss in heaven!" said Althea—"And so she would be; for so well do I know her affectionate heart, that I am certain unkindness from Philipson would prove her death-warrant."

"We are going to grow melancholy," said Mrs. Charlton, observing the tearful eyes of Althea; "I am glad to see Mr. Sedley and Mrs. Moreton approaching: they will give our conversation a more lively turn. Now we shall hear something about Farnham, I dare say, for Sedley looks full of news."

Mrs. Charlton was right; Sedley was in high glee.

"Come," said he, "I am here to summon you to Farnham. The theatre is nearly completed, such is the power of good pay and good promises. The latter end of next week is fixed for our *debut*, and I bring Mrs. Sedley's earnest request that you two ladies would honour us by your presence. Miss Vernon, we set you down as a performer."

"Then pray recall your purpose," replied Althea—"I would not appear as one for all you could offer me."

"Are you serious?"

"Perfectly so—I am determined never to act a part either in real or in mimic life."

"I defy you in the first—Every woman acts a variety of parts. A single woman acts that of an all-complying, placid, good-tempered angel; a married one, that of a virago, or a mule—no ass so obstinate."

Mr. Sedley's countenance plainly betrayed that he and his mate had held a warm discussion that morning. Mrs. Charlton

looked very gravely at him, and he endeavoured to recover his usual smiling serenity. He turned to Mrs. Moreton—"Well," said he, "I shall tell Mrs. Sedley you will do us the favour to be one of our audience, together with these ladies. You allow me, I hope, Mrs. Charlton?"

"Yes, I have no objection, if Mrs. Sedley wishes it," replied Mrs. Charlton.

"And I am sure I have none, if Mr. Moreton will let me," said Mrs. Moreton, with a doubtful sigh.

"Ah! that asking leave is the devil," said Sedley, with an affected shrug. "We poor married objects, of either sex, must ask leave and obey; which latter word, though pronounced by the lady only at the altar, is understood to belong equally, and is better performed by the other party also. I think maids and bachelors are the only happy set of people."

"What a philippic you pronounce against your own sex in such an avowal!" said Althea. "I am sure good husbands will always make good wives, and upon

their conduct principally depends the good or ill of married life."

"Oh! your servant, Miss Vernon," said he gaily—"I much fear I trace evident symptoms of an old maid in that Mrs. Charltonish speech. But don't be too severe; I have a scheme in my head for you at Farnham, which I think very likely to change your ideas of single blessedness. And so, ladies, good morning."

"You should have been at Sedley's this morning," said Mrs. Moreton, as soon as he was gone—"He and his wife have had such a debate, I might say quarrel, about this theatre. He was so gay and so funny, and so good-humoured all the time, and she was so sullen and sad! I often wish she and I could change spouses. She is just such a queer, grave, prudent thing as Mr. Moreton, and I am sure I should never quarrel with Sedley for wishing to be gay, as she does. Lord! what signifies always looking forward? She has but three children, and never *may* have any more.

I hate women always expecting to have a house full."

Mrs. Charlton held Mrs. Moreton as too incorrigibly silly to waste either argument or advice upon her, and took very little notice of her speech, except to give Mrs. Sedley all the praise which, as an amiable sensible woman, anxious for the future welfare of her family, she well merited—praise in which Mrs. Moreton could not join, and which Althea, who admired Mr. Sedley, thought rather overstrained.

"I know what Sedley's scheme is about you, Miss Vernon," said Mrs. Moreton, with a silly laugh—"He told me all about it coming along. Shall I tell it to you, and put you on your guard?"

"If it is of any serious consequence to my future destiny, I shall be glad to be warned," replied Althea.

"Well, it is, for it is about a lover."

"Oh! then I'm sure I have no curiosity on such a subject, since I shall always be on my guard against such insidious ani-

mals, and shall certainly choose for myself, without any scheme."

"Dear! how grave you are! you are more like an old person—like Mrs. Charlton, or Mrs. Pawlet, than a young lady only nineteen. You will certainly die an old maid, like those two."

"Mrs. Charlton must be highly flattered by your naming her with Mrs. Pawlet," returned Althea, indignantly: "To resemble Mrs. Charlton in every thing is my first ambition, and will give me more consequence with sensible people than a wedding-ring."

Mrs. Moreton slipped her multitude of rings, with which she was playing, quietly on her fingers, believing that Althea talked at her when she mentioned a wedding-ring; and hastily rising to take leave—"Well," said she, "I shall go home, and try if I cannot either wheedle or plague Mr. Moreton out of a permission to go to this dear Farnham, and if I cannot gain one, I am determined to go without, for go I will."

The ladies gladly saw her depart; and having commented a little on the scene of the morning, and talked over the journey to Farnham, Mrs. Charlton ordered the carriage, and they proceeded to make several morning calls, diversified from each other only by the different manner in which the same tales of scandal were talked over and promulgated. They returned to dress for the opera, where they went, a sober party, in the evening. Mr. and Mrs. Sedley were with them, and Althea could not help observing how entirely they seemed to have changed characters. He was grave and taciturn, whilst she was in high spirits; and Althea admired to see how smiles and animation could produce almost sparkling beauty in a face naturally only pretty. The cause puzzled her, though she approved the effect; and she began to fancy the husband and wife were a pair of contradictions.

CHAPTER XV.

Hypocrisy, detest her as we may,
(And no man's hatred ever wrong'd her yet)
May claim this merit still—that she admits
The worth of what she mimics with such care,
And thus gives virtue indistinct applause.

COWPER.

THE appointed time filled Farnham Villa with guests; and amongst them came Mrs. Charlton and Althea. Farnham was a small, but very beautiful cottage *(a modern cottage,* which is understood to possess every luxury, and to owe its name to the indispensable *thatch only)* on the banks of the Thames, about ten miles from town. Mrs. Sedley's smiles were now again transferred to her husband, and it was evident she only tolerated the company he had so lavishly collected together in her name. The last finish was not given to the inte-

rior decorations of the theatre, the ostensible motive of this visit; but the interval was well supplied by walking, riding, parties on the water, music, dancing, and—making love. Amidst so many, and such varied occupations, who could be dull? There was much laughter—a great deal of mirth—and, possibly, some happiness in all this.

Althea sometimes thought it tiresome, but she was a girl of rather singular opinions, and, Miss Preston thought, very absurd; since, though all the young men appeared to bow at her shrine, not one of them could manage to draw her into any thing like a flirtation, which Miss Preston declared was the very essence of life. Amongst the gentlemen, however, Althea had her due share of praise and admiration; for though no flirt, she was always ready for sensible and animated conversation, and even *badinage*. Hers was the calm gaiety of an innocent heart, at peace with every one, and disposed to see every thing through its fairest medium. Of love, Al-

thea had never yet been the serious object, nor had she ever felt its influence.

"What a curious confession!" said the gay Miss Preston, who had teazed Althea out of an acknowledgment of this kind—"Nineteen, and never in love! Why I have been in love, and out of love, twenty times."

Althea could hardly help laughing outright at this declaration, which seemed to put her on a level, as to age, with a withered coquette of forty-five. Miss Preston saw the smile which dimpled round her mouth, and translated it pretty accurately.

"Oh, I am somewhat older than you, I am aware," said she, colouring extremely, "and have a right to have had more experience in these affairs of the heart; but, really now, do you not long to feel the charming agonies of love, whose misery delights?"

"No, really, I have no *penchant* for agonies or miseries of any kind," replied Althea, laughing; "and if that is your best

definition of this enchanting passion, I hope never to feel it."

"Oh, but Miss Preston can give you a much prettier picture than this, if she pleases," said Mr. Sedley, who had joined them unobserved, "for she has entered the bower—

> 'Where woodbines flaunt, and roses shed a couch,
> Whilst evening drew her crimson curtains round.
> She knows the infectious sigh—the pleading look,
> Downcast and low, in meek submission drest,
> But full of guile.'

Miss Preston can give you a much pleasanter account of the blind god than his 'charming agonies,' believe me."

Sedley spoke with sarcastic meaning, and Miss Preston, though she affected to laugh, and call him a "dear, rude, teazing wretch," looked vexed, mortified, and somewhat ashamed.

"Whatever may be the charms or terrors of this tormenting deity," said Althea, "I am happy in having hitherto escaped his power, and shall be perfectly satisfied

to pass through life a stranger to his godship and his wiles."

"That sentiment is too selfish to be indulged, and one I little expected to hear uttered under your roof, Sedley," said a strange voice. The trio turned round, and Sedley, with undisguised pleasure, begged leave to introduce, in a most particular manner, his friend, Mr. Pelham Wrottesley, to Miss Vernon. "Miss Preston you know, of course," he added.

"Oh! of course," returned his friend, nodding. He then made a very elegant bow to Althea, and begged he might not interrupt a conversation apparently so interesting. This being addressed to Althea only, she felt herself obliged to speak; and saying she left the further discussion of a subject, in which she had owned herself completely a novice, to those who avowedly understood it, she curtsied to Mr. Wrottesley, and quitted the party. Something she did not quite like struck her feelings, in this abrupt and studied introduction of

the newly-arrived stranger; and she suddenly recollected a 'scheme,' with which Sedley had threatened her at Farnham, in which, she now doubted not, Mr. Wrottesley was to participate; and she resolved to avoid and dislike him. Avoid him she might, but to dislike him, she soon found, was not so easy. His appearance was in the highest degree prepossessing; and we all know how very far that goes, even with the oldest and wisest of us. He was not regularly handsome, but his eyes and teeth were fine, his countenance remarkably sensible and expressive, and his figure a model of manly elegance. A certain reserve and seriousness recommended him to Althea more than a gayer turn would have done; and his conversation was a seasonable relief from the insipidity of the gabble and unmeaning compliments of the other beaux. It was evident, too, that he preferred Althea to every other female present; and Rochefoucalt was never less mistaken in the human heart, than when he said that "we love those who admire

us, more than those whom we admire." Not that Althea felt the slightest symptom of love for Wrottesley. Her heart, as she said, seemed inaccessible to love; and there was a degree of coldness and *hauteur* about his manners, which were not calculated to thaw the ice, of which he sometimes complained to Sedley.

A week after the arrival of this gay party, the theatre was opened to a very numerous and brilliant audience. Mr. Sedley gave to the character of Mr. Lovemore, in "The Way to Keep Him," all the vivacity and animation it required, and seemed, indeed, but too much *at home* in it. The rest of the characters were as well cast and as well represented as private performances of this kind usually are, and the whole *went off* with great eclat, and those lavish encomiums which it would have been rude and impolitic to have withheld. A grand and expensive supper followed; and in the violent mirth which generally prevailed, the sadness of the

mistress of the mansion was scarcely noticed, or if observed, severely censured. Althea was never violent in any thing; and she and her shadow, Mr. Wrottesley, were, as usual, calmly engaged in a quiet conversation, in which Mrs. Charlton occasionally joined. The good lady had observed with great pleasure the attentions this young man had paid to Althea, and the admiration she had unequivocally inspired him with. She knew that he was a man of unblemished character, cultivated understanding, and very large fortune; and though she was herself happier as a single woman than she could have been as a married one, she wished Althea to find a congenial mind, and become a happy wife. She knew nothing of Mr. Wrottesley's temper; and though she had assiduously applied all her observation to discover its real bias, she had hitherto been unable to decide upon that important point. Althea had been pretty much employed upon the same subject, though so unconsciously, that had Mrs. Charlton

accused her of it, she would have very innocently denied any such study. Certain it is, that without any thing at all resembling love for Mr. Wrottesley in her sentiments towards him, she found a kind of pleasure in tracing his character, and dwelling upon its leading features; but with all her study, and all her penetration, she could not analyze his temper. Amidst his gayest sallies, a cloud would cross his brow, if any one interrupted him by a word or look he disapproved, and he was evidently very haughty. These things Althea acknowledged and lamented; but as Mr. Wrottesley was certainly nothing to her, nor ever would be, she wondered why she did acknowledge it with so much regret. Mrs. Charlton, sometimes seriously, and sometimes in jest, accused her of loving him, and hoped she did; but Althea's answers were generally so plain and quiet, and made with so little emotion, that she quitted her as unconvinced as ever.

In the meantime, Althea's observations

were not all confined to Mr. Wrottesley; her host and hostess came in for their share; and these remarks convinced her, that it is only in the interior of his own home that a man's real temper can be thoroughly known.

It happened that Althea's dressing-room joined that of Mrs. Sedley, and into the latter Mr. Sedley very seldom entered, except, as she supposed, to settle the pleasurable arrangements of the day. One morning he came much earlier than usual, and the conversation, Althea concluded, went on the common topic of amusements, till she heard Sedley exclaim, in a very loud tone—"By G—d! madam, but she shall—I will be master here, and invite whom I please—tears, always tears—you poor whining moppet! you are enough to make a man think of a mistress, if he never did before!"

"Oh, Mr. Sedley," replied his weeping wife, "how seldom do I torment *you* by tears or reproofs! I am sure the world little suspects, from any *display* of my

feelings, how perfectly wretched I am. You insist upon appearing the best of husbands to a deceived world; and though I am well aware how I am stigmatized, because I cannot always hide my feelings, when did I ever make it appear that all your fine attentions in public meant nothing? I know I am called a poor, stupid, discontented thing; and you are pitied for being incumbered with me, but I never betrayed the real truth."

"When the devil is this palaver to end?"

"Now, if you please, and welcome. Give me some money, to send to Norris for the use of the children, and then don't let us speak again for a week."

"Money! where am I to get it? what do the brats want? I'll be hanged if you do not plague me to death for money, though you know I never have any."

"I don't often get it, if I do plague you, I'm sure; and you know it to be true, I have not had five pounds on my own account these three months. I de-

clare to you, I was forced to borrow a shilling of Miss Vernon yesterday, to give to the boy who held my horse at the farm-house. I should blush to death to have her guess the truth."

"Oh, the old girl gives her plenty; you might as well have borrowed more when you were about it; and if she marries Wrottesley, she will roll in riches, and ought to pay something for my introducing her to him."

"Well, but money I must have."

"Will you be civil to Mrs. Layton if I give you some?"

"If she must come, I will try and do what I can—but why must she come?"

"Because I chuse it. Upon condition that you conduct yourself properly to her, there's a five pounder—I can spare no more."

"Oh, Sedley! what, with that pocket-book full? and this only for the children and myself?"

"I have plenty of uses for my money, which you have no business with—I can

give you no more. What the devil do the children want?"

"Meat, drink, and firing."

"Well then, give them water-gruel, which is both meat and drink; and make them run about to warm them—Farewell, *my love*."

With this affectation of kindness, and a satirical laugh, he departed; and Althea heard Mrs. Sedley weep bitterly. It was not without great repugnance that she had remained to listen to a conversation so evidently designed to be private; but the fact was, she knew that upon the opening of her door, Miss Preston, and two or three more like her, were ready to enter, as she had promised to shew them some London finery, which she had that morning received, and for which they were impatiently waiting in the next room, till she had finished a letter she was writing. She was well aware that the disgraceful secret she had thus unwillingly obtained was safer with her than with them, and her

first wish was to keep them from a knowledge of it. She now admitted them; and after a sufficient time given to admiration, she sought Mrs. Charlton with a very oppressed heart, and met Sedley with sentiments of contempt she dared not betray.

"Every thing," she thought, "conspires to strengthen my determined preference of a single life. My last trial in favour of matrimony is at Feltham Vicarage—if I am disappointed there too, I am an old maid decidedly; and in the meantime, Wrottesley shall have no influence. Pshaw! he never has had any."

CHAPTER XVI.

The brain may devise laws for the blood, but a hot temper leaps over a cold decree. SHAKESPEARE.

ALTHEA was mistaken when she said Wrottesley never had any influence—it was daily and hourly increasing; and had Sedley arranged the party for the sole purpose of forwarding his "scheme," he could not have selected his guests better, for they were all excellent foils to Wrottesley, whose manners, information, and conversation, were as much superior to the common mass of male society, as Althea's to those of her own sex. Had she thought his temper a good one, and his disposition conciliating, her heart would have been entirely captivated; but he had shewn some involuntary starts of pride and caprice, which made her guard her feelings, and she was only touched, not irretriev-

ably wounded; and it remained, though she was herself not aware of her danger, for Mr. Wrottesley's own conduct to complete a conquest of which he must have been proud, had he fully understood all her character.

She had repeated to Mrs. Charlton, and to her only, the bitter conversation which had opened her eyes to Sedley's real temper; and they mutually agreed to quit Farnham before the arrival of Mrs. Layton, whose true character they could no longer doubt.

"Nor indeed have I ever doubted that of Mr. Sedley, since I have visited intimately in the house," said Mrs. Charlton: "I have long known that he was merely acting a part, and he is aware that I do know him. I did not endeavour to undeceive you, because I was pretty certain that a girl of your penetration would not fail to detect him yourself, whenever a residence in his family put him in your power, by putting him more off his guard. His temper is at once violent, and insolent-

ly cool, as circumstances render the effect most galling—a profligate amongst women—a gambler—and an extravagant spendthrift in all which concerns himself; but economical, to stinginess, to his wife and children.

"Poor Mrs. Sedley is one of the best of wives and women, and one of the least understood and appreciated; her whole endeavours are exerted to support appearances decently, and hide his faults and vices from the world; for bad as he is, she still loves him, and, for her children's sake, would anxiously preserve him from shame, and the obloquy he justly merits. —She educates her children herself, and lives in comparative indigence, that he may still make the appearance, which, were he deprived of, he declares he would not survive.

"Mrs. Layton is a scourge, I grieve to say, but too common in many families. Still preserving, though with difficulty, a doubtful character, and not discarded from the acquaintance of those she most injures,

because they dare not enrage her, she visits unblushingly those who ought to blush at receiving her. You wonder, perhaps, that I say this, after you have seen her once in my house; but you will believe me, when I assure you that she was there for the first and last time—brought in by Sedley himself, for she would not have had the effrontery to come without such an excuse. I gave Sedley a severe reproof, and made her absence from Farnham a condition of my coming. Her appearance here will send me off; and he will understand me. Poor Matilda! she has sometimes flown to me in any great distress, and I have been so happy as to relieve her for a time. I knew her young and pretty, and full of the gayest spirits of unchecked happiness. I knew her parents too—very particularly—" Mrs. Charlton sighed deeply—"and never shall she know a *want*, from which my purse can relieve her. Mrs. Layton will soon make her appearance here, I dare say, and I therefore think we may as well return to town

to-morrow, if you can be ready at so short a notice."

"Oh, to-night if you please; my preparations are soon made," replied Althea.

"And does no lurking wish remain to continue here a little longer?" said Mrs. Charlton—"No advocate for Mr. Pelham Wrottesley plead in your bosom? Can you be so insensible?"

"I have no reason, that is, no *particular* reason, to suppose that Mr. Pelham Wrottesley himself wishes to influence my going or staying, or seeks to find an advocate in my heart in his behalf; he has never declared *his* sentiments in any way which could authorize him to endeavour to penetrate mine."

"His eloquence of eyes requires but little rhetoric from his lips. His sentiments must be evident to you, as they are to every one else. What is your real opinion of him?"

"Upon my word, my dear Mrs. Charlton, you put me to some difficulty. I hardly know what is my opinion of Mr.

Wrottesley, for he seems a contradiction in himself. Sometimes I am charmed with him—admire his sentiments, his information, his manners—and fancy I could like him very well; then suddenly comes some gust of passion or ill-humour, for which *I* cannot account, and which sweeps away every idea of happiness, and every feeling of preference."

"You will take no harm if you can continue to discriminate thus."

"I think I never shall take any harm from love, for I have seen enough of married life, and *real life*, not to be deceived by gay and animated descriptions which veil the truth from inexperienced eyes. I never will marry till *I think*, and *you are convinced*, that the man's temper is congenial with my own."

"Then I believe I may hail you one of the sisterhood; for, depend upon it, no man's real temper was ever yet ascertained, till he became a *married* man; not even mothers or sisters, or friends of the most intimate nature, can ever discern his na-

tural temper—that discovery is reserved for his wife; and a blessed one it generally proves."

"You frighten me," said Althea, laughing; "but a longer discussion is prevented just now, for there is the second dinner-bell, and I have not put on all my decorations for the evening ball."

Mrs. Sedley's eyes, in spite of rose-water, bore testimony to her recent distress; but, though not unmarked by many of her guests, none but Althea and Mrs. Charlton believed it to be any thing more than one of Mrs. Sedley's sullen fits, and therefore not worth noticing. Sedley himself was as gay as usual; sedulously polite and attentive to her, whom he constantly addressed as my love, or my dear Matilda; and affecting to lament her want of spirits and appetite, exerted himself more than usual to make up for her deficiency, and succeeded in pleasing effectually all those who had not the power of penetrating behind the mask he wore. Mrs. Charlton

and Althea were almost the only persons who paid this unhappy wife any attentions, for the rest found her gravity disgusting and her sighs repulsive, and left her to the indulgence of a temper they believed incorrigibly disagreeable, since not even Sedley's vivacity and kindness could amend it.

In the evening, Althea's partner, as usual, was Wrottesley, who, as if divining that this was the last they should spend together for some time to come, exerted himself more than ever to entertain her. He evidently sought to make himself an interest in her heart; and his penetration convinced him not entirely without success. Althea's ingenuous eyes and blushing cheeks betrayed more than she would suffer her guarded lips to acknowledge; and drew from the impassioned Wrottesley a thousand expressions of admiration, and at length an unequivocal declaration of love, esteem, and hope. Althea, though confused, and somewhat vexed, half pleased

and half alarmed, refused to give any reply to such a hasty, and, she insisted, so unthinking an avowal.

Wrottesley gravely attested his sincerity, and she gaily protested her unbelief, till she at length found he became seriously anxious to impress her with a conviction of his sincerity. Althea, however, still distrusted too much the sentiments he had inspired, to be drawn by his impatient pleadings into any thing which could be construed into encouragement, at the same time that her confused and hurried manner convinced Wrottesley he was not so indifferent to her as she wished him to believe. Althea knew too much of matrimony to reply hastily; nor would she have answered at all decisively to an address of this kind, without Mrs. Charlton's advice, and a thorough examination of her own sentiments, of which, at this moment, she felt herself much more doubtful than when she saw Wrottesley only as an acquaintance whom she could like, not as a man she was expected to love.

"This cruel suspense is what I did not exactly expect, Miss Vernon, and what I know not how to endure," said he to Althea's refusal to give an immediate answer. "You are no coquette; why, therefore, trifle with a passion, the progress of which you must have traced ever since I had the happiness of knowing you—you must have expected the declaration of this passion, for your sex are sufficiently clear-sighted on those occasions, and must have, consequently, analyzed your own sentiments in developing mine."

"Perhaps all this may be true in part," replied Althea, "and yet, at a moment like this, I may naturally hesitate about an answer which involves all the happiness or otherwise of my life. That I do not dislike you is obvious, by my *not* immediately replying; but I own to you candidly, that I have never sufficiently thought of your character and temper, or so decidedly anticipated this moment, as to be just now in calm possession of my own sentiments. My ideas of love and mar-

riage are singular, and require much time to arrange."

"You are a cold, insensible, yet very charming girl," replied Wrottesley, "and I have never yet met with any one like you, nor any one I could expect to be happy with so entirely. You are too sensible a woman, Miss Vernon, to believe me, if I told you I should die of grief if you reject me; but I very truly declare, that I shall in such a case be very unhappy. My temper is not very placid, I own; but yours, so mild, so forgiving——"

"Oh, build nothing on that, I beg," said Althea: "My temper is perhaps less forgiving than you imagine, since, though I can pardon inadvertent errors and casual starts of passion, I could not overlook pride or caprice, or a tyrannous love of shewing power, which I have seen but too often in married people. My own temper is full of faults, I am well aware, but I trust not equal to giving pain for the mere pleasure of the thing."

"And do I, or do men in general do so?"

"I have seen it but too often in men and women too—it is called *badinage*, and frolic, before marriage, but the same thing becomes very different, by being differently taken, after."

Wrottesley was preparing a smiling reply, when a Mr. Boston, a very genteel young man, in passing, accidentally trode on his foot. With a haughty scowl and inflamed cheek, deaf to the repeated apologies of the young clergyman, Wrottesley turned round, and in a tone of bitter irony, exclaimed—"Surely, sir, your father soled *your* shoes with wood."

The sarcasm was deeply felt, and wounded as he intended it should; for Mr. Boston senior had been a shoemaker—had made a very large fortune in business, and given his son the education, the manners, and the *feelings* of a gentleman.

Young Boston looked for a moment indignantly at his insulter, and seemed

inclined to speak; but observing in the countenances of those around that the general feeling was that of disgust towards Wrottesley, he took the offered arm of sir William Jenner, and silently left the party. Wrottesley looked very silly and ashamed; but turning to Althea, he attempted to renew the conversation which this incident had interrupted, and began to apologize for his temper.

"Our conversation may end here, now and for ever," said Althea, coldly—"You have convinced me your temper and mine could never assimilate, and that we shall never be more to each other than at this moment."

Wrottesley attempted to expostulate; but Althea curtsied silently, and withdrew.

CHAPTER XVII.

Virtue and vice had boundaries in old time
Not to be passed, and she that had renounc'd
Her sex's honour was renounc'd herself
By all that priz'd it; not for prudery's sake,
But dignity's, resentful of the wrong. COWPER.

WROTTESLEY'S devoirs to Miss Vernon had been sufficiently remarked by the rest of the party, assisted by Mr. Sedley's hints, to draw upon him many a quizzing laugh, and much of the commonplace wit upon matrimony so prevalent amongst fashionable men; and the very indignant manner in which she had addressed her parting speech to him, though the matter was unknown, rendered him the object of condolence, every one pronouncing that he had lost his mistress. Wrottesley himself, though not wholly without fears of a similar nature, affected to laugh at

the temporary anger Althea had betrayed, though in truth her manner was too contemptuously cool to be called anger, and tried to believe, what he assured his friends was the case, that this slight alienation would be recompensed by a still warmer return of more favourable sentiments. His self-love prompted him to hope this, though the well-known firmness of Althea's temper, and the ideas she entertained on the subject of matrimony and suavity of disposition, he acknowledged were against him. He had been painfully startled at observing the very cool and collected tone in which she had spoken her entire renunciation of him; he would rather have seen her agitated by anger, and crimsoned with vexation; but no—her countenance retained its usual calm and placid colour, and her eyes only evinced that she despised the ebullition of unmanly violence which had broken for ever the charm between them. He determined to make one penitential effort

the following day: and if that failed, she might go to the devil. He tried—he failed; but Althea did not "go to the devil."

In the meantime, Althea was relating to Mrs. Charlton the events of the evening, and was gratified by receiving her approbation at the close of her narrative. —"But I assure you," added Althea, with something approaching to regret in her countenance, and a stifled sigh, "I assure you I was very nearly taken in by this man's specious manners and deceitful looks. I could have loved him, I really believe, and am very thankful that he pulled off that pleasing mask before I was irrevocably caught. I shall never be in such danger again, for I promise you I shall be doubly wary and suspicious in future."

Mrs. Charlton smiled—"Suspicion," said she, "is so little the attribute of youth, that this—what shall I call it?—may I venture to say disappointment?—this error of yours in judgment will soon lose

its prudential effect. You will again believe in appearances, and again be deceived; for you, ingenuous and amiable as you are, will not be able to detect the thousand artifices which are practised to conceal the real temper and disposition. Wrottesley is too impetuous to be artful, and the unexpectedness of the incident threw him off his guard. Perhaps some private pique, or dislike towards Mr. Boston, might rankle in his mind."

"Oh! say no more, if you mean to be the advocate of Mr. Wrottesley," said Althea—"His only excuse is, that he *was* thrown off his guard. Your idea of a previous pique savours so much of malignity, that though I have no interest in his real motives for such conduct, I cannot bear to think him guilty of it. Men are altogether bad, I really think, and I never will marry. Shall we go to-morrow?"

"Yes, certainly; but as I am anxious for a little private conversation with Mrs. Sedley before I leave this place, I shall

not be ready very early. If, however, you have any objection to meeting again with Mr. Wrottesley, you may easily employ yourself here after breakfast, and you know we always breakfast by ourselves."

"No," said Althea; "I have no wish to see any more of this fiery gentleman, neither will I take any pains to avoid him. Such a mode of conduct might give him an idea that I was unhappy and disappointed, and that I could not bear."

Althea was right; and Wrottesley was more mortified, and more convinced of her indifference, by seeing her join the party in the music-room with her usual composed manner, than if she had shunned the society in which she might expect to meet him. He took the opportunity, however, of her appearance there, to renew his apologies, his vows of regret for his casual and most *uncommon* want of temper and politeness, and his offer of his hand and fortune. Althea coolly thanked him, but

assured him she was fixed in her determination; and Wrottesley and she were in future strangers.

The interview between Mrs. Charlton and Mrs. Sedley turned upon no new topic, and at this time required little discussion. Some circumstances of a peculiar nature, closely connected with Mrs. Charlton's early history, had rendered Matilda an object of great and affectionate interest to that amiable woman, and she scrupled not to confide to her those many sorrows which she concealed so carefully from a misjudging world. She found in Mrs. Charlton's advice her greatest assistance—in her affection her greatest consolation; and the liberal hand of the good old lady supplied her occasionally with the pecuniary assistance (bestowed in such a way as to render her bounty doubly welcome and wholly inoffensive) which offered the only means she frequently had of making a decent appearance, both for herself and her three children. Sedley knew this, but he meanly shut his eyes, or pretended

to do so, to the truth, and took no other notice of the circumstance than to endeavour to avail himself of it by borrowing money of his wife, after he knew that Mrs. Charlton had been with her. At first she was absurd enough to acknowledge the fact, and give him the supply bestowed for a far different purpose, and this from a notion of duty; but Mrs. Charlton convinced her that such an exertion of obedience was not only unnecessary, but wrong; and Sedley could no longer deprive her of this only resource, though he made it a continual cause of dispute, and a plea for never advancing any himself.

Mrs. Charlton was precisely the sort of woman to manage a negociation of kindness with address and delicacy, and Mrs. Sedley received the "*little present for the children*" without feeling humbled, and without the most distant idea that the conversation between herself and her husband had reached the ears of any one. Mrs. Charlton fully understood the difficult art of conferring a favour: No im-

pertinent advice degraded the receiver, or took from the pleasure of accepting the useful gift. Her heart was all benevolence—her manner all kindness; she left Mrs. Sedley at least less wretched, and congratulated herself that she had arranged her leaving Farnham that day, when upon going down stairs, she saw various packages directed to Mrs. Layton in the hall, and that lady's confidential abigail busily employed in receiving others from the chaise from which Mrs. Layton herself had just stepped forth. Very formal were the greetings between these ladies, and very foolish the countenance of Mr. Sedley, as his eyes met, with all the consciousness of guilt, the reproachful glances of Mrs. Charlton.

Althea could not prevail on herself to exchange more than a very distant curtsey with a woman she so thoroughly despised, though Mrs. Layton advanced towards her with all the smiling effrontery of one secure of being well received. She affected to laugh off the oddness of their

behaviour, but, in spite of her rouge, she betrayed more confusion than she wished, or intended.

Althea quitted Farnham, with her opinion of the lords of the creation greatly lowered, and with a complete abhorrence of her host in particular.

Wrottesley saw her depart with more real concern than he chose should be apparent to the gay group around him; and taking his gun, absented himself for the rest of the day, which he passed in regrets he unwillingly acknowledged to his own heart; and that heart ached more than any one suspected, notwithstanding the affected gaiety with which he attempted to veil the truth, when he joined the joyous party in the evening.

CHAPTER XVIII.

———For aught that I could ever read,
Could ever hear by tale or history,
The course of true love never did run smooth.

SHAKESPEARE.

ALTHEA had now nearly had enough of London and its pleasures. She began to languish for the delight of seeing Isabella, and sharing in all the quiet enjoyments of the vicarage. Her new-found experience, however, had made her suspicious, and she intended to watch even Philipson very narrowly. Mrs. Charlton had promised to take her to Feltham whenever she went; and as that lady had some business which detained her a little longer in London, Althea was obliged to restrain her impatience, and defer a week or two her wished-for change of abode.

The conversation during their drive home naturally turned upon those whom they had just left, and Althea could not suppress her curiosity to know why Mrs. Sedley was so evidently the peculiar care and favourite of Mrs. Charlton, since she had owned there was no relationship between them.

"Your curiosity is natural enough, my dear," replied Mrs. Charlton, "and it shall be gratified, though to do so I must enter into some little detail of my own early history, which may tax your patience. You know I was an only child, and heiress to a very considerable fortune; and this circumstance, you will not doubt, obtained for me very early notice from the neighbouring families who had sons to dispose of, and from the sons themselves. I was not then the plain, pale, homely person I am now, and I had not to complain of a dearth of lovers. My heart soon made its own election; and so fond were my parents, so indulgent to all my wishes, that though the chosen of my affections was

not the man they had mentally selected, they did not offer any opposition, and I believed myself the happiest creature in existence. Mr. Elmington was young, gay, and handsome; he was, besides, extremely sensible and well-informed, and appeared devoted to me—Could a girl of eighteen expect more? I thought not of temper, for I never saw him otherwise than perfectly amiable, nor heard a sentiment but such as seemed to be the echo of my own. In short, Mr. Elmington appeared every thing which I or my parents could desire, and the preparations for our marriage went on rapidly.

"Business relating to some of the marriage articles required Mr. Elmington's presence in town. My father's house was in Dorsetshire, and the *immense* distance to which he was condemned for a few days offered a subject of most pathetic complaint to my lover. Every day for a week brought letters full of bewailings at his cruel fate, which compelled so long an absence, and I regularly replied in the

same tone of despondency. The second week he seemed to bear it better, whilst I really bore it worse, for I began to find something not altogether satisfactory in his letters; yet they were as frequent and as declamatory as ever, and *read* as well; but there is a degree of doubt and apprehension inseparable from real love, which trembles for ever in the heart—a woman's heart especially, for hers is ever the more genuine passion. I was dissatisfied with Elmington's expressions, yet I knew not how he could have altered them, and I began to think his absence unnecessarily prolonged. To pass over all the painful incidents of that period, let me say at once, that after seven weeks of suspense and wretchedness, which it is even now torture to remember, my father himself went to town, and found, after some trouble, that Elmington had been married a fortnight, to a woman with a fortune infinitely superior to mine, and was then, with his bride, on a voyage to the Madeiras, for the recovery of her health. She had declared

herself in a deep consumption when he married her, brought on, as he was made to believe, by love for him. He believed this tale at the time, and felt it some excuse for his conduct to me; but circumstances afterwards proved that he was only a convenient tool, selected by this artful woman to revenge herself on a faithless lover. She, like me, had been deserted, and she believed that to marry another would at once prove her own indifference, and wound the vanity of her deceiver.

"I cannot dwell upon the feelings which followed this dreadful blow. They were doubly embittered by the conviction that Elmington was cruelly deceived in every respect relative to the character of the woman he had married, and his dream of happiness must necessarily be transient. So entirely I loved him, that, miserable as I was at his defalcation, I could have extracted some degree of comfort in believing he was happy; but the accounts my father brought of her levity, her temper, her total want of good principle, forbade the in-

dulgence of such a hope, and I grieved at once for him and myself. Much as my parents wished me to marry, they were too indulgent to harass me on the subject; and my heart could never form another attachment sufficiently strong to induce me to change my name.

"The death of my mother, indeed, soon after my unhappy disappointment, threw my father so entirely on my cares for all his domestic comforts, that he soon became reconciled to a determination which secured them to him for ever. As to Mr. Elmington, he received a punishment for his conduct to me from the very person who seduced him to error, and a far more dreadful one than I ever for a moment wished him. After two or three years of quarrelling and misery, his unprincipled wife accidentally met with her first perfidious lover, and the consequences were such as might be expected from a woman like her. She eloped with him, and a duel and divorce followed. The guilty pair were married, which was itself a fu-

ture punishment to each, as great, perhaps, as either deserved. Of their fate, whether they now live, or where, I know nothing, and my only hope is never to see nor hear of her again.

"It was more than a year after this affair had lived its day, and been forgotten, except by the actual sufferers from it, that I was roused from the usual state of melancholy quietude into which I had gradually sunk, by a letter, the writing of which was indelibly impressed on my remembrance. It was from Elmington, dated from a little inn near our house, and requesting an interview either with me or my father. The style was in the last degree melancholy; and I could not hesitate to comply with the request, for the letter expressly said it related wholly to his child. I saw him—I saw the shadow of Elmington, wasted, broken down by misfortune, and sorrow, and repentance. Oh! how unlike the Elmington I had last beheld! when, gay with hope, and love, and happiness, we had

parted, as each then believed, for a few days! Years had intervened, and both were altered, but he beyond measure. The interview was too exquisitely painful to be detailed, or ever forgotten. She who is now Mrs. Sedley was then a lovely laughing Hebe, about three years old. Elmington committed her to my guardianship; I accepted the sacred trust, and we met no more. A few months afterwards I learned the tidings of his death; and circumstanced as he was, I could hardly regret the event, which yet I wept incessantly. His own fortune was not originally large, and his wife's had been returned at their separation. Matilda, therefore, had not much; but that little was never lessened by me. With my father's consent I educated her, and in every respect considered her as my own; and she was soon the beloved and cherished plaything of the family. When my father died, he left her a handsome addition to her small fortune, and to me he bequeathed riches which enable me to add to the

comforts of my less fortunate fellow-creatures, and in this consists their principal value.

"Fifteen years Matilda Elmington constituted the happiness of my life: 'then the spoiler came!' for truly has the insidious Sedley proved a 'spoiler' there. You who were so completely deceived in him, without the blinding veil of love and youthful credulity, may imagine how great must be the interest he was enabled to gain, and how entirely he could hoodwink a girl of eighteen, already deeply in love with him. He deceived me effectually, severely as I had purchased experience; no wonder then that Matilda was deceived, or that she married him, with the most brilliant hopes of happiness. Sedley's fortune and rank in life were at that time unexceptionable, for he had not been in possession of the family estate long enough to have diminished it, nor were his habits of dissipation then so rooted. You know his person, his manners, his gay temper, and apparent good-humour,

and you will not wonder that Matilda loved and married him. That pleasing veil, which, like too many, he puts on abroad, has long been discarded at home, at least in company, and you now know him as he really is. Matilda rarely complains, even to me, and never to any one else; but I know so much, that I can read every turn of their features, and what he inflicts and she suffers. Fortunately I had a part of her fortune, which was not inconsiderable, all things put together, settled on herself, and this is some restraint on his violent temper, for he is pretty sure that, owing to his extravagance, a time may come when he may find this a welcome resource, and that it will require some influence over her to procure it.

"Such, Althea, is my true little history—long enough, however, to have tired me in the recital, and you in the hearing; and only proving, perhaps, that men were always deceitful, and women foolishly credulous; and so, I doubt not, it will remain to the end of the chapter."

A few comments on this history brought the travellers to their comfortable home, where, as Mrs. Charlton gave her several orders, unchecked by any authoritative rebukes *from* a cross husband, or humble "may I do so and so?" *to* one, her young and reflective guest made a mental resolution, almost amounting to a vow, never to put it into the power of any man to tyrannize over her.

A cheerful evening, though without the aid of company, succeeded to the history of other times; for Mrs. Charlton dismissed the appearance of gloom with the subject that caused it, and they amused themselves with laying plans for a speedy migration to Feltham. But a letter in the morning rendered the schemes of the evening nugatory, by claiming Mrs. Charlton's presence with an old friend, who was anxious to see her again ere she died.

"This is every way unfortunate, Althea," said she; "for I cannot leave you here alone, and I doubt, after what has happened at Farnham, you would not be

comfortable at Sedley's. Have you any violent objection to sacrifice a few days, for it will not be more, to my friends, the Mrs. Marsdens? Mrs. Bridget, I own, is sour enough, but Mrs. Penelope will do all she can to make you comfortable. Besides, you may learn something there which may again change your opinion of 'single blessedness.' You have hitherto seen that state in its most favourable shades —you may now learn to view it differently, and yet not wholly disadvantageously either."

Althea did not much relish the plan, and would have proposed going immediately to Mrs. Philipson, but she knew how much Mrs. Charlton reckoned of taking her there; and recollecting that a few days would soon pass over, she cheerfully agreed to go to the Mrs. Marsdens, provided they as readily agreed to receive her.

Of that Mrs. Charlton made herself certain. She wrote to Mrs. Penelope, who returned a polite answer, containing a

pressing invitation to Miss Vernon; and Althea prepared to pay a visit, which was to shew similar situations in a very different light. The chariot conveyed her to her new abode, at a small house in Kensington, whilst a postchaise carried Mrs. Charlton to her sick friend, some miles from London.

CHAPTER XIX.

———Why then 'tis none to you;
For there is nothing, either good or bad,
But thinking makes it so.
To me it is a prison. SHAKESPEARE.

ALTHEA met with a very kind reception from Mrs. Penelope Marsden, and at least a civil one from Mrs. Bridget, which was as much as she ever accorded to any one. The difference of both, however, as well as their situation, from that of Mrs. Charlton, was very striking, and Althea felt

already as if she should be glad when her penance was performed. The house was small, inconvenient, and shabby, with all the disadvantages of a house near town without a man-servant, and none of its pleasures; for of all the attributes of a public road—such as gaiety, bustle, and an ever-changing scene, the mansion got only the dust occasioned by this change, which blew in clouds over the wall which separated the road from the dingy little garden, which it spoiled. Nothing could be less enlivening than this garden, into which the only sitting-room looked. Althea, indeed, from her chamber-window, could see the tops of the carriages, and the outside passengers on a stagecoach; but for that she had no great taste, though Mrs. Marsden (Mrs. Bridget, the elder) frequently expressed her admiration of the *look-out* from that window. The ladies were not very inspiring—the cats themselves looked grave and sententious—the parrot never spoke a word; and the only lively thing in the house was an old spa-

niel, who was starved into activity, incessantly jumping up in hopes of victuals, if any one entered the room. Mrs. Charlton was aware of the narrowness of these ladies' income, and Althea's carriage was amply supplied with such delicacies as she knew they could not procure, and did not dislike. This attention, and Miss Vernon's quiet pleasing manners, together with her being "an *excellent listener*," gave her great merit with her ancient hostesses; and finding her sojourn there inevitable, she calmly resigned herself to endeavouring to please them, if possible.

Mr. Marsden, the father of these ladies, had held a small place under government, and this income, added to his own little fortune, had enabled him to live with comfort and decency, and bring up a large family respectably. His father had formerly been steward to Mr. Charlton; and thus the Miss Marsdens, when at their parent's death the emoluments of office ceased, and pecuniary embarrassments succeeded, became the immediate care of the

Charlton family. Of many children, four only survived—two daughters, married to little tradesmen, and widely dispersed, and the two now introduced most unwillingly remained unmarried. With Mrs. Charlton's assistance they took a small house at Kensington; and had they followed her advice, would have taken a shop, which she offered to stock for them; but pride interfered, and they preferred a painful sort of gentility to so vulgar a way of living in comfort. At Kensington, therefore, they fixed, and passed their days in vain regrets at their single state and endless quarrels. Nothing could exceed the civil contempt they mutually entertained for each other, particularly the elder for the younger; for Mrs. Penelope had been a beauty, and had rejected two or three sighing swains in the plenitude of her power, whom, in its decline, she would gladly have recalled. Mrs. Bridget had never known the advantages of beauty, nor the solicitations of admirers, and she could not altogether forget and

forgive the pre-eminence of her more favoured sister.

With such a pair, Althea's days were not the most agreeably spent, particularly as in their continual disputes they each appealed to her as an umpire, and she was certain she must offend one if she gave a decision, and both if she withheld it. To the rest of Mrs. Bridget's recommendations may be added a strong bias towards methodism, which influenced her very considerably in her choice of acquaintance. With many of these peculiarities Mrs. Charlton was wholly unacquainted, for she saw them only occasionally, and then of course they were completely on their guard, and kept all the overflowings of bile and anger to themselves till she had departed. She knew they were thoroughly respectable, and believed them to be not unpleasant. Had she known them exactly, Althea would not have been their guest.

The first evening of Miss Vernon's in-

troduction at Kensington was given to a walk, in which they were joined by several of Mrs. Marsden's friends, and Althea only hoped they should not meet any of hers.

The following day at breakfast, Mrs. Marsden proposed to her sister to invite a party for the evening—"I think Miss Vernon will find it so dull here," said she.

Althea assured her she was by no means fond of company, and should be much happier alone.

"That is your politeness, my dear," replied Mrs. Penelope; "but it is natural at your age to like amusement—I did myself. Whom shall we ask?"

"Why I think the Morleys, and good Mr. Norris."

"Mr. Norris! Lord, sister! you must recollect if he comes we can only have a serious evening, and that would be very stupid for Miss Vernon. I want a pleasant cheerful party."

"That's so like you, Pen—always crazy for fun and mirth. A little serious con-

versation would do Miss Vernon no harm. Now you want a great overwhelming party—you are never easy but when you are in company."

"Why how can you say so, Biddy? Did I propose a party this evening? I'm sure I had much rather be alone—rather, at least, than have such humdrums as you always select. *I* have no predilection for saints and psalm-singing, and prefer a cheerful pool or rubber a thousand times: I am not arrived at the age proper to turn devotee."

"No such great way off neither, if *I* am," retorted the angry Mrs. Bridget: "but people who fancy they have been beauties never know how to give up the idea, or the airs attendant upon it, however mistaken."

"Well, my dear," replied her sister, with a most complacent simper, "that's a mistake *you* never could fall into at any part of your life. But do not let us amuse Miss Vernon with any more of our

disputes. If we cannot agree upon a joint party pleasantly, let us each have one in our own way; so invite one to-night of your friends."

Mrs. Marsden bustled on her cloak and set off; but fortunately for Althea, the pious crew were principally engaged in attending the funeral obsequies of a rich old lady of their own calling, who, mindful in death of the peculiar taste of her former associates, had left orders that the prayers they offered for a comfortable birth for her soul should be duly repaid by attention to their wants of the flesh. A supper, therefore, consisting of every delicacy, in and out of season, was garnished with noyeau, cherry-bounce, and every thing delicious *in that way;* and a pious hymn or ejaculation to the memory of the deceased was washed down in a copious libation, till an agreeable mist began to overspread the eyes and the mental faculties of her zealous admirers. The holy kiss of charity and fraternity went *lovingly* round, and the feelings of the outward

man sometimes overpowered the ardour of the regenerated Christian.

To this pious assemblage Mrs. Marsden was invited as soon as she appeared, and thus the little parlour was left free for Mrs. Penelope's more agreeable party at home. She collected round her some lively and conversable people; and Althea found the evening not displeasing, though very unlike what she had ever before been accustomed to.

"I'm sure we may congratulate ourselves on my sister's absence," said Mrs. Penelope, "for she thinks cards such an abomination, that she is shocked if she only opens the drawer which contains them. And yet, I'm sure such a party as we have had this evening is much more innocent, and much less marked by want of charity, and *certain feelings*, than the one in which she is now engaged. I once obliged her by going with her to one of these meetings of love, as she calls them, and really I was glad when I found myself safe at home. The little income we

have is sadly dipped into by my sister for these people, who are no friends to dry prayers, and we fast for a week to provide them a supper for an evening. Our fortune is so small that we cannot separate, and we are the only remains of our family, except our two married sisters, and they are in a manner lost to us. Whoever outlives the other will be very forlorn; but still, when people do not agree comfortably, they are better alone. I should not continue with Bridget, only I know those saints would eat her up; but she is a sad gloomy companion."

Althea perfectly agreed with Mrs. Penelope in this opinion, and in their prolonged conversation easily discovered that she was very unwillingly a spinster.—"To be sure," said she, "I could escape from my sister's ill-humour, which I could not have done from a husband's, and to be sure the little I have is my own, and I may spend it as I please; but still there is a comfort in having family connexions, which, particularly in old age, compensate

for much discontent in earlier life. I don't believe any woman was ever voluntarily an old maid—not even Mrs. Charlton, as happy as she is: and sure I am that no poor woman ever was."

"Indeed," said Mrs. Amy Finch, a very cheerful and respectable old maid, who had outstaid the rest of the party, "indeed you are mistaken; I might have married more than once, yet I am still single, and very happy on an income of less than sixty pounds a-year. I have no natural connexions, except one nephew, who allows me twenty pounds a-year; but I feel that I have many friends, and that I am in every respect independent. If I have but little, I dispose of it as I please; I have it in my own pocket, and have not to ask an unwilling husband for a scanty supply given with a grudging hand, and a surly remonstrance. My book of expences is not called over with a pre-disposition to quarrel with every article. If I choose to buy a new gown, no husband looks askance at it, and after two days of

silent sulking, tells me I am d—d extravagant. I go out without asking leave, or saying where; and if I have no one to receive me but Molly and my cat, I have no one to chide me because I staid so long. In fact, my good friend, much may be said on both sides. Contentment is the grand sweetener of life in every state, and unless you behold things through that medium, nothing will make you happy. I think the balance of comfort more even-handed than many people do, between the married and the single; but I own *I* believe it inclines to favour our sisterhood. If we have less exquisite happiness, we have less positive misery; and I am convinced the thread of married life is indeed 'a mingled yarn.' A single woman may be comfortable if she will; a married one *will if she can.*"

Althea went to bed, confirmed in her belief that old maids had the advantage.

CHAPTER XX.

To such I render more than mere respect,
Whose actions say that they respect themselves.
But loose in morals, and in manners vain,
In conversation frivolous, and in dress
Extreme, at once rapacious and profuse;
Frequent in park, with lady at his side,
Ambling and prattling scandal as he goes.

COWPER.

THE face of Mrs. Marsden the next morning exhibited a dismal prospect of pious gloom. Her eyes were half closed—her mouth drawn down; sighs, amounting to groans, escaped her continually, intermingled with ejaculations of godly import, and hints, well understood by her sister, of people who gave up their precious time to worldly concerns. The frequent changes of Mrs. Penelope's complexion proved to

Althea that her presence alone prevented a violent quarrel, and she sat uncomfortably expecting every moment would add to their acrimonious feelings, till that slight barrier of respect to her was broken through.

The entrance of good Mr. Norris dissipated these threatening clouds for the present. Mrs. Marsden rose hastily, whilst an attempt at a smile passed over her crabbed features, as she exchanged the embrace of love and faith with the rosy, smirking, well-powdered Mr. Norris. He then advanced to Mrs. Penelope, to whom he offered a similar demonstration of good-will, but she indignantly drew back, and the preacher looked very silly. Presently recovering himself, however, he turned to Althea, and, with twinkling eyes, begged leave to be introduced to the amiable maiden. Althea did not like his looks; and fearful he might wish to extend his kiss of universal love to her as well as Mrs. Penelope, she slightly returned his profound bow, and ran out of the room as

he approached with extended hands. Mr. Norris could not conceal his chagrin, and looked so extremely foolish, that Mrs. Penelope could not help a violent fit of laughter.

"Solomon," said the indignant little man, turning to the offender, "Solomon has declared there is a time for all things —'a time to laugh and a time to cry.' Pity it is he could not infuse into all hearts a knowledge of this truth, and likewise the exact time when mirth is becoming or otherwise; then would you, madam, have restrained this offensive effusion of levity, nor have encouraged that young maiden in such gross deviation from propriety."

"And you, my good sir, would not have looked so much as if you were inclined to cry at missing a kiss from a pretty girl. I don't know who amongst us may have the *wisdom* of Solomon, but I am pretty sure good Mr. Norris has a competent share of one part of his *folly*."

"Heed her not, my dear sir," said Mrs. Marsden; "I am shocked at such blas-

phemy; my soul is moved, and trembles for her wickedness. Let us retire to my closet, and pass a precious hour in praying for her conversion. Verily my soul is disquieted within me. Let us retire."

"May we not hope to take with us the young maiden who so rudely left the apartment?" said Mr. Norris—"She seemeth as if a little serious discourse would be of great use to her. I would fain do her some spiritual service."

"Oh no! hope it not. Her spiritual concerns have been too greatly neglected for even your pious endeavours to be of use. She has only been taught the arts of the devil to entrap mankind; to dress, and dance, and sing, and such vain fancies as may inveigle the hearts of sinful men. Carnal delights alone occupy her mind. But let us not lose our time in thinking of a foolish girl."

"I should think it time well spent, could I be the blessed means of bringing that stray sheep to the true fold," whined good Mr. Norris—"Verily the damsel is

fair and goodly-looking. Pity it is she should wander in darkness and error. Permit me to try the influence of grace."

"No, no—I tell you she is incorrigible," replied Mrs. Marsden. "Besides," she added, in a whisper, "I have provided a small treat—an early pigeon or two, and some excellent shrub—Be persuaded."

"Truly, good madam, your reasoning is full of wisdom," answered Mr. Norris, "and I submit; but I can only consent to defer the good work of conversion—I must again behold this maiden. Doth she dwell here, in this mansion of faith, and love, and all godliness?"

"Alas! no. She sojourneth in the great world. But enough of her—I yearn for the spirit."

"For once I believe you, Biddy," said the angry Mrs. Penelope—"The spirit is indeed your present care, and good Mr. Norris's too; the question is only, what sort of spirit? I suppose the best pine-apple shrub, as I saw some brought in this

morning. Oh! if Mrs. Charlton knew this!"

"I defy your malicious insinuations, sister Pen.—I am so shocked, Mr. Norris—but, poor thing! she has never had the advantages I have had, nor can I persuade her to try your comfortable doctrine. Forgive her, good sir, and follow me."

Mr. Norris began a hypocritical ejaculation; but observing that Mrs. Marsden had gone towards the sanctified closet, and that his present companion paid no attention to him, he bowed with a mortified air, and followed her sister.

In the meantime, Althea, disgusted with every thing she saw and heard, gave way to low spirits, and bitterly lamented her not having gone to Isabella at once, when Mrs. Charlton was called from London; and Mrs. Penelope found her in tears when she went to her room. She soon, however, shook off a weakness of which she was ashamed, and readily agreed to accompany her friend Penelope to call on

Mrs. Amy Finch, with whom she had been much pleased the evening before. There she found order, neatness, and comfort. The old lady was reading, and the fine cotton stockings which she was knitting lay on the table by her. A little silver hand-bell stood at her elbow, ready to summon old Molly, and puss sat very gravely on the blue damask cushion, which occasionally supported her mistress's foot. Every thing bore the marks of humble but comfortable independence; and the placid cast of Mrs. Amy's features shewed the absence of all family cares and family quarrels.

"How I envy the quiet of your little parlour!" said Mrs. Penelope Marsden: "I really think, at last, I must part from Biddy—she gets so abominably ill-tempered and pious."

"'Tis a sad perversion of the word piety," replied Mrs. Finch, to whom Penelope had repeated the scene which had recently occurred. "I am sorry when I hear of such things, for they are calculated only to bring

real religion into disrepute, at least amongst the idle and unthinking. I know the character of this Norris well, and I am somewhat afraid Miss Vernon may find him troublesome, unless she entirely secludes herself from him, and that, as your sister is his proselyte, may be difficult. He has no sense of decency in him, and I dare say will almost live at your house, for the sole purpose of annoying this young lady. If he does, Miss Vernon—and I know my friend Penelope cannot prevent it—if he does, will you come to me during Mrs. Charlton's prolonged absence? I am almost ashamed to ask you to such a dull place and such homely fare as I can give you; but if you can overlook that, and find yourself uncomfortable at Mrs. Marsden's through this canting fellow, come to me."

Althea longed to stay from that moment, for every thing there promised comfort, but she dared not do that. She gratefully thanked the kind old lady, and with Mrs. Penelope's permission, and indeed ad-

vice, joyfully promised to avail herself of the invitation; nor could she help hoping some impertinence of Mr. Norris's might send her there directly.

"In this request," said Mrs. Finch, "I intend no disrespect to you, Mrs. Penelope, for I know how different your sentiments and conduct are from your sister's; but I know also the much greater power her eldership, and the violence of her temper, give her in the house; and that such is Norris's influence over her, and his own impudence, that you cannot prevent his intruding himself at all times. Do not mention our plan to Mrs. Marsden, if you wish to profit by it, as she would certainly tell him, and here he knows he dare not venture to shew his face."

The impertinence of Mr. Norris, and the sneers and sarcasms of Mrs. Marsden, after a few days more had elapsed, drove Althea to Mrs. Finch's snug and hospitable home. Mrs. Charlton was still detained by her dying friend, but every day expected her death would release her from her attend-

ance. Her presence, however, was so great a relief to the sufferer, that she could not prevail on herself to withdraw it, particularly as she felt assured she had placed Althea safely and respectably, if not in every instance exactly what she might have preferred. Althea's answer was such as to confirm the error, for she did not wish to add to the distress she knew Mrs. Charlton was suffering on her friend's account, by any unpleasant feelings on her own. She made her escape from Mrs. Marsden and Mr. Norris, who watched and plagued her incessantly, with the help of Mrs. Penelope, and Mrs. Amy Finch welcomed her with all the urbanity of friendship, and all the politeness of good-breeding. Mrs. Bridget, indeed, attempted violently to assert her claims to Miss Vernon's company, till the return of the person who had entrusted her to her care; but Althea coolly refused to return to any place where Mr. Norris had access; and Mrs. Bridget returned home equally angry and frightened, for she knew not what account she

should give to Mrs. Charlton, for having allowed Althea to be treated with such rudeness as to compel her to quit the house. Mrs. Penelope, who was sure of being exculpated by Althea, felt quite at ease, and enjoyed the distress of her sister, and the rage and confusion of good Mr. Norris.

Mrs. Finch's house was a sweet contrast to the one Althea left. Though obliged to be frugal in the extreme, every thing was nice and neatly served up. Mrs. Finch did not pay her guest so ill a compliment as to depart in any striking way from her usual habits of economy, nor did she perplex her with apologies for the plainness of her accommodations.—"To all you see you are heartily welcome, Miss Vernon," said she—"I have too openly declared the narrowness of my income for you to expect much, but what I can give I give freely, and you will, I hope, as freely partake. We may be very comfortable, though I am very humble."

Althea proved the truth of this asser-

tion. Liberty, enjoyed but not abused, reigned throughout the comfortable abode. They did as they pleased—they had no one to please or displease but themselves—no one to thwart or control their wishes.

"All this is much better than being married," said Althea.

"I promise you I think so," replied Mrs. Finch—"If I had been married I must have said, 'may I ask Miss Vernon from that wretched home to mine?' and most likely I should have been denied, or pestered with a hundred whys and wherefores before the wish was granted. *I* find the name of old maid, so dreadful to many, and so unwillingly adopted, a passport to comfort and the liberty of pleasing myself."

"And so," replied Althea, "will I; and I'll make myself a set of neat mob caps like yours, and enrol myself in your corps as soon as possible."

CHAPTER XXI.

Ah! that deceit should steal such gentle shape,
And with a virtuous vizor hide deep vice!

SHAKESPEARE.

FOUR days passed in the greatest harmony in Mrs. Finch's comfortable abode, at the end of which period Mrs. Charlton arrived in person to claim her young friend. Great, of course, was her surprise at not finding her where she first sought her, at Mrs. Marsden's, for Althea was aware how unpleasant an impression a letter, which could be but half explanatory, would make on Mrs. Charlton's mind, and therefore had left her in ignorance of her removal till she could give a satisfactory history of the whole. Mrs. Charlton, though excessively displeased with Mrs. Marsden, had too much candour to blame her sister for what she clearly learned from Althea she could

not help. She said but little on the subject; and making them the present she had always intended for them, made up her mind to have but little communication in future. These ladies were of a character which she knew would not shrink from receiving any remuneration she chose to offer; but it was different with Mrs. Amy Finch, whose delicacy of sentiment and manners required a more delicate mode of conduct. Nothing, therefore, was immediately offered; but before Mrs. Charlton left London, several useful little articles of taste, rather than necessity, which Althea had seen Mrs. Finch wished for, had found their way to Kensington in her name; whilst a hamper of fine old wine marked Mrs. Charlton's sense of obligation.

The good old lady wished to refuse some of these gifts of gratitude, for she had acted from a better motive than a hope of this kind of return. She passed a few days with Mrs. Charlton and Althea in Beaumont-street, previous to their leaving town, and, by her cheerful amiable manners, laid

the foundation of a lasting friendship with both. Mrs. Penelope was occasionally noticed as usual, but Mrs. Marsden was quite discarded from Mrs. Charlton's favour, and found her only comfort in abusing her and Althea, in conjunction with "good Mr. Norris," who cordially lent his aid to that effect.

Spring was now blooming luxuriant in beauty, and Althea began to feel London hot and oppressive. She languished for Isabella and the country, though her more gay and dissipated acquaintance assured her town was but now beginning to be delightful; and indeed Althea found, by the continual influx of company, and perpetual annunciations in the papers of the arrival of fashionable families, that the London winter was now in its zenith. But she was too much the child of nature and reason to prefer a London crowd, hot rooms, and a sultry atmosphere, to the pure breezes of the country, fresh verdure, and the scents of early flowers.

Mrs. Charlton saw her impatience, though

she never troubled her with expressing it, and hastened to arrange every thing for their speedy departure.

Althea very quietly braved the quizzing of her more tonish acquaintance on the rusticity of her taste, and saw, without the least pain, the sneers of fashionable impertinence.

The Sedleys had returned to town before Mrs. Charlton quitted it, and their final call of ceremony was there. Mrs. Sedley was, as usual, pensive and thoughtful, and Althea fancied she looked more unhappy than ever. She retired for a few minutes with Mrs. Charlton, and Althea and Sedley were left *tête-à-tête*. Althea was too frank, and too little able to disguise her real sentiments, to leave Mr. Sedley in any doubt of the alteration in her opinion of himself. He felt that she had ceased to esteem or be pleased with him, but he imputed all that to Mrs. Charlton's communications, well aware that she had no reason to like him. With this impression on his mind, he had lately avoided

Althea as much as he had formerly sought her, and treated her with great ceremony whenever they did meet. He now ventured to approach her, and accused her of thinking less favourably of him than she once did—"But that," said he, "I can trace to the right source—Mrs. Charlton and my wife."

"Indeed you are completely mistaken in imputing any such change to either," replied Althea. "I never heard Mrs. Charlton speak of you till after I myself —that is—till——"

"That is, till after you had ceased to think well of me. Well, that is candid, however, if not polite. Perhaps Mrs. Sedley was kind enough to draw a *favourable* likeness?"

"Whatever likeness Mrs. Sedley draws of you, I am apt to believe is a flattering one; certain I am they are all highly favourable. You destroyed, yourself, the illusion in my mind, though by what means you will never know, and Mrs. Sedley does not even suspect."

"You are certainly not too lenient, Miss Vernon," said Mr. Sedley, colouring excessively, "and are very enigmatical. I believe I am neither better nor worse than the generality of married men, and Mrs. Sedley's grave uncongenial temper——" He caught Althea's eye and hesitated—"But it was not of myself I meant to have spoken," he continued, "and I beg your pardon for intruding so unpleasant a subject on your ear. That you were quitting London I knew, and I am commissioned by a gentleman, who dares not himself approach you, to renew the offer he once made, and he then flattered himself not unacceptably, of his hand and fortune—I mean Mr. Wrottesley. Some slight disgust, I understand, occasioned a sudden change in your sentiments there too."

"My disgusts are never sudden, nor founded on slight occasions," replied Althea, coldly. "I confess I once thought highly of Mr. Wrottesley, and he had some reason to know that I did. That I have long ceased to do so he knows also,

and why I changed my opinion. Nothing has occurred since to turn my thoughts into their former channel, and Mr. Wrottesley has no longer the least interest in my heart."

"I did not think you had been so easily offended, or so hard to propitiate."

"I am neither," answered Althea—"Indeed I am not offended with Mr. Wrottesley at all; I rather feel obliged to him that he discovered his temper before my regard was sufficiently engaged to endanger my happiness. At any rate, he is not hypocrite enough to play a systematic part long together, and for that I like him; but a temper so violent, so insolent as his shewed itself to Mr. Boston, would inevitably make me miserable, and I should be mad to make the trial."

"You are condemned, Althea," said Mr. Sedley, laughing, though internally much provoked — "You are certainly doomed to wear the willow, and you are really too pretty for an old maid. Let me

advise you to compassionate Wrottesley and yourself, and avoid so horrid a catastrophe."

"Is Mr. Wrottesley then the only man whose heart I can expect to engage? If so, I am decidedly an old maid for life."

"Ah! Miss Vernon, you have betrayed yourself," said Sedley. "There is then another, more fortunate than poor Wrottesley, who has made an impression on that adamantine heart."

"I thought adamant was incapable of bearing any impression. But assure yourself, my heart is yet wholly my own, and it must be some creature very unlike any I have hitherto seen who can prevent its continuing so. I have had too many examples of happy old maids before my eyes, to feel the least reluctance at becoming one amongst them; and I have discovered, in the boasted state of matrimony, much wretchedness beneath a smiling mask."

"Then my wife did not wear it," said Mr. Sedley, attempting to hide his chagrin under a joke—"I am sure her mask,

if she wears one at all, is a very appalling one."

"In this instance the mask is worn by the husband," replied Althea; "and I'm sure that is a smiling one, unless when he hears a harsh truth or two from an impertinent girl."

Mrs. Sedley now returned to the room, and her eyes bore evident testimony to her interview with Mrs. Charlton. Mr. Sedley looked at once mortified and angry —"My wife's is completely a Melpomene mask now, you will allow, Miss Vernon," said he, in a low and indignant tone.

"I rather suspect it is no mask at all," she replied. "It is in your power, and yours only, to replace Melpomene with Thalia at any time, not in appearance, but reality. Is it not worth the trial?"

"Marry Wrottesley, and I will," he answered.

Althea looked at him a moment with surprise, and the conversation she had overheard between him and his wife darted across her mind, and she could not help

fancying there had been a scheme to draw her in, though what end it was to answer she knew not; for she could not think ill enough of Wrottesley to believe he would implicate himself and her in any plan to serve such a man as Sedley. Certainly the feeling was very unpleasant, and very painful, and she turned from Sedley with an air of disgust he well understood, and, she could see, deeply resented.

The ladies parted with mutual expressions of good-will and regard, but very coolly indeed with Mr. Sedley; and they were not much mistaken when they expressed their conviction that he would relieve the rancour of his malignant heart by quarrelling with his unhappy wife, who, in parting from Mrs. Charlton, felt that she lost her best, and almost her only friend.

A lovely morning in April gave added zest to the delight with which Althea entered the carriage which was to convey her to her mother and sister. Her heart beat high with the anticipation of her own

and Isabella's happiness; for, much as she had seen of married life, and greatly as she had been disappointed in its general tenor, she yet hoped, with the buoyant spirit of youth, to find an exception in her sister—"This is my last trial—my last hope," said she to Mrs. Charlton, who sat placidly smiling at her enthusiasm; "if I do not find happiness where I am going, I give up the idea altogether, and will never believe it can be found in wedded life."

A beautiful journey brought them the second evening to Feltham Vicarage, which the death of the former incumbent had just secured to Philipson for life.

CHAPTER XXII.

Domestic happiness! thou only bliss
Of Paradise that hast surviv'd the fall!
Tho' few now taste thee unimpair'd and pure,
Or tasting, long enjoy thee! Too infirm,
Or too incautious, to preserve thy sweets
Unmixt with drops of bitter, which neglect
Or temper sheds into thy crystal cup. COWPER.

On a rustic bench, placed close by a trellis, supporting a "luscious woodbine," sat Mr. and Mrs. Philipson. She was putting the last finish to a neat robe, intended to adorn the expected infant, whilst he read to her. The little lawn was fresh mowed, and exquisitely neat, and a beautiful collection of greenhouse plants were tastefully placed in different positions. The lilacs were in full bloom, the liburnums hung their graceful bunches, and looked like waving gold. The gueldre-rose threw up

her "silver balls, light as the foaming surf, which the wind scatters from the broken wave." All nature seemed dressed in her loveliest garb to welcome the long-expected strangers; and the weather added its propitious influence, for it was one of those luxuriantly mild still evenings, which sometimes, though rarely, bless our variable climate.

This charming scene of natural beauty and conjugal harmony greeted the eager eyes of our impatient travellers, through the light foliage which surrounded the miniature lawn, and which, not yet fully expanded, allowed Althea to enjoy the delightful foretaste of that domestic comfort which she had, in spite of her recent experience, dared to anticipate for her beloved Isabella.

"They *are* happy—they must be happy, my dear friend," said she, as with tearful eyes, and lips trembling with emotion, she saw and smiled at the scene she beheld.

Another moment brought the carriage

within the neat inclosure, and Philipson, with gay smiles, flew forward to assist them from it. Isabella followed him more deliberately, and was soon clasped in Althea's arms. The first few minutes were all joyful confusion—questions asked and answers given, and pleased exclamations on the mutual good looks of all.

"How well Philipson looks!" said Althea; "I declare he is grown almost handsome with that fine clear complexion and healthy bloom!"

"*Grown* handsome! I admire that too!" exclaimed his wife — "*I* never thought him otherwise, though I remember there were people impertinent enough to do so."

"I am sure Althea is uncommonly improved, both in face and figure," said Philipson; "and yet she was always pretty enough to content a reasonable man."

"You could not possibly say less, after the handsome compliment you received," said Mrs. Philipson; "but instead of praising each other's beauty, let us draw round

the tea-table. I remember Mrs. Charlton always loves a cup of tea after a journey, and I therefore ordered my first dish of green pease to be prepared an hour later than usual."

The tea equipage was all ready in the parlour, and thither this little happy party repaired.

"My favourite cakes are not forgotten, I see," said Althea.

"Nor my brown loaf," said Mrs. Charlton; "I have tasted nothing like this in all London, my dear. You are still the same Isabella, I see, always attentive in these trifling kindnesses, of which every one feels the value, and which are of so much more importance in social intercourse than people generally imagine."

"I know no one who would better appreciate this art of shewing much by trifling attentions than yourself," replied Philipson; "for you practise it more fully and more delicately than any one I ever knew—I'm sure both Bella and I have reason to say so.—Althea," he continued,

after a short and general pause, "Althea, when are we to expect Mr. Wrottesley? and how many more poor love-lorn devils do you expect will follow you hither?"

"I cannot exactly say," replied Althea, "but they will all come with Mr. Wrottesley, I dare say. Pray how or where did you pick up that piece of gossip? You do love news dearly, that you must own."

"Why, I heard that Mr. Wrottesley was in constant attendance at the gay villa of one Mr. Sedley, and that he played Romeo to your Juliet, and that you smiled like an angel, and blushed 'celestial rosy red."

"I never heard such a downright fiddle-faddle of a newsmonger in my life as you are," returned Althea, laughing—"Pray did you believe all this farrago of nonsense?"

"Yes, certainly—why not? I hope 'tis all true."

"Althea, don't answer him; let him burst in ignorance," said Mrs. Philipson, "and tell me all about it by ourselves."

"Ah, do, Althea," returned he, "and then I shall hear it all again, and spare your blushes."

"What I have to tell I have no objection to say in general assembly. I never played Juliet—Mr. Wrottesley never played Romeo, that I know of—and he is nothing to me, nor ever will be."

"Do you say this in sober sadness, Althea?" asked Philipson, looking much surprised.

"Yes, indeed; and now tell me who told you a word about Mr. Wrottesley?"

"A gentleman whom I met at Arlingham's, where I lately staid a week; and I think Wrottesley's attentions, which it seems were misconstrued, deprived you of a much better match. Certainly sir Montague Vavasour seemed considerably annoyed when he talked of the affair."

"Who is sir Montague Vavasour?" said Althea, turning to Mrs. Charlton.—"Did I ever see him?"

"Yes, my dear," replied Mrs. Charlton; "and that curious question proves how

much Wrottesley did, at the time, engross your attention, or you could not have overlooked such a man as sir Montague. He was a short time at Farnham, but left the party abruptly."

"Yes, he left Farnham for Westhaven, and great was his surprise to find himself in company with your sister and two brothers-in-law. He made me his confidant, and I have no sort of objection to betraying his secret, if you have the least wish to hear it."

"I have no curiosity at all, thank you," said Althea. "Isabella, have you seen Elizabeth since I left Westhaven?"

"No, really I have not; and to tell you the truth, her own letters, and Philipson's history of his visit there, do not much incline me to go. I am afraid she has played a desperate game, and lost all chance of happiness—at least what I call and feel to be happiness, and all influence over Arlingham, by her mistaken and perverse idea of shewing a proper spirit. Arlingham told Edward he fully intended to

have taken her to London for three months, if she had not plagued him so. Then she knows how anxious Arlingham is for a son, and she has twice disappointed him, entirely through her own folly and obstinacy. And, to conclude all, she has established an intimacy with the very people whom he cannot speak of with patience—the Pantons. I am grieved to my heart for her; but talking or writing does more harm than good. My mother tried the first, and I have urged all I can by letter."

"My mother has been to Westhaven at last then?"

"Yes, she went with Mr. Philipson; but she came back so disgusted, and angry, and grieved with both of them, that I hope she will go no more. He is so mean, and so litigious, and so unlike all we thought him, that she says she makes more excuse for Elizabeth in her heart than she is willing to render apparent to her. I'm afraid he is a very indifferent intimate for George, who is naturally selfish

enough, and adopts Arlingham as his model completely."

This account was corroborated by Philipson; and Althea was glad to turn from the feelings it excited to the picture of domestic happiness immediately before her. Philipson appeared all kindness and attention; and as Isabella's situation precluded much exertion on her part, he seemed very willing to devote his time a great deal to reading to her, and certainly was completely a domestic man. Isabella herself, when only with Mrs. Charlton and her sister, expatiated on her own happiness in the highest terms, and gave to Philipson unqualified praise—"He is always what you now see him," said she. "Since I have been unable to walk much, he sits at home with me, or employs himself in beautifying this pretty place. We have never known the honour of a dispute, nor have I ever asked for any thing which he has denied me. He must be an excellent manager, for he keeps the

supplies; and though we have nothing extravagant, I sometimes wonder how he contrives to make our limited income go so far."

Althea thought this was only the extreme of good management, but Mrs. Charlton pondered upon it much more seriously.

Late in the evening Mrs. Vernon joined the happy party, for she had been engaged out all day, and, as she said, her donkey-cart was not quite so expeditious a mode of travelling as Mrs. Charlton's carriage. The green pease were excellent, and much praised and enjoyed. The cowslip wine was pronounced exquisite. Mirth and good-humour made every thing delicious, and all agreed there was nothing half so good at Westhaven. Isabella's languid looks at last broke up the party; and the spotless white beds, the trellissed windows covered with flowers, and contented hearts, invited to calm and sweet repose. Althea, indeed, meditated a little before she closed her eyes, on the different view she here

took of matrimony, and mentally acknowledged there were situations in which it did not seem altogether so hateful. She tried to recollect sir Montague Vavasour, but she could only recall the image of a very plain man of that name, and she fell asleep before she could make up her mind whether it was the one spoken of by Philipson.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Of temper as envenom'd as an asp,
Censorious, and her every word a wasp,
In faithful characters records the crimes,
Or real, or fictitious, of the times,
Laughs at the reputations she has torn,
And holds them dangling at arm's length in scorn.

COWPER.

THE following morning was devoted to looking over the various presents which the generosity and thoughtful care of

Mrs. Charlton had provided, and enabled Althea also to offer to her young friends. Philipson soon went off, with all the pleasure and eagerness of a schoolboy, to try his beautiful new fishing-rod, and bring home a trout for their dinner, from the stream which flowed in front of his house. Isabella, with grateful delight, turned over, with admiring care, the simply elegant paraphernalia for herself and her baby. Beautiful laces and fine cambrics in a variety of forms met her eyes.

"I shall never dare to produce my own trumpery now," said she; "you will not deign to look at such unornamented robes and caps."

"They are not very rich nor very expensive, my love," replied Mrs. Vernon; "but being your own work, they will have a great value in the eyes of your friends, and are a proof that you know how to combine elegance with economy."

Isabella could neither dance like madame Parissot, nor play like madame Bianchi, nor practise a score other brilliant

nothings, like other illustrious foreigners, of no service whatever in humble life; but she understood the arts and sciences of domestic usefulness, and amongst these, she numbered what *she* called one of the most important, an admirable facility at using her needle.

'Tis well we did not set out with making our heroines fashionables, for such a trait as this would have at once destroyed their credit and our own. We know, however, too much of high life and fashionable women, to believe them so vulgarly useful.

Mrs. Philipson's situation, who expected in the course of another fortnight to be confined, precluded visiting; and only a few of their most intimate friends therefore called at the Vicarage, till after that event. Althea, after so long a visit in the smoky atmosphere of London, enjoyed beyond measure the breezes and the liberty of the country; and Philipson found her always ready to become his companion in a walk or a fishing-jaunt. She tried

to entice him into Isabella's *jaunting-car*, but there he strenuously resisted, and laughingly quizzed the idea of the parson in a donkey-cart. Althea therefore drove herself, and generally made some neighbouring children happy by giving them a ride. She generally drove her mother from the Vicarage to the Lea, and back again, as occasion required; and renewed her long-interrupted intimacy with her few favourites in her old neighbourhood. Althea was herself a general favourite, but she was too fastidious to have many intimates. She required something more than mere chattering common-minded girls, who had not two ideas beyond love, dress, and domestic management. She was kind and civil to all—loved a few—but neither communicated her own affairs, nor listened voluntarily to the secrets of others, unless she could relieve any distress or embarrassment by a participation.

Nothing material occurred during the period in which all parties anxiously expected Isabella's accouchement. A little

girl, and its mother's safety, at length rewarded them. Philipson was highly delighted, and the grandmamma, of course, thought it the eighth wonder of the world. Isabella's recovery was rapid, and the little girl's wonderful growth repaid its mother for her cares.

Mrs. Philipson's re-appearance at church was the signal for that of her neighbours; and cakes and chocolate, and the baby, were for some days in great request. Althea was much amused by the contradictory opinions expressed by the various visitors respecting the likeness of the infant to its different relatives, for she had seen too little of such visits not to know that this was a mere matter of course, and those who found out some astonishing resemblance had perhaps scarcely looked at the child enough to ascertain if it had two eyes or one. Nor was she aware that of these friendly callers, who were so happy to see "dear Mrs. Philipson and the lovely little creature so purely," one half, at least, came to look round them for ob-

jects to criticise and sneer at when they were gone.

"Did you observe," said Mrs. Ogilvie to lady Cotman, "what an expensive robe that little imp had on? I'm sure that must come from town, and from one of the first houses too."

"And her own dress—did you remark that?" observed lady Cotman, with her usual expression, between a scowl and a sneer.—"I can only say, *I* never wore such a sitting-up dress with all my thirteen children; and I think sir Thomas Cotman's lady has, at least, as much right to wear rich lace and cambric as a parson's wife."

"Why yes, one would suppose so indeed. I hope her finery is paid for, that's all. *I* always thought it a great piece of folly to dress out infants in such an expensive style."

"Why, as to that," replied lady Cotman, "Mrs. Philipson has a great deal of that vulgar knowledge, best suited, after all though, to her situation, such as needle-

work, and making pastry, and keeping accounts, and all that sort of thing; so that I should not wonder if the brat's robe, after all, was only a piece of muslin rag, neatly jemmy-stitched. Her own was certainly too handsome for her situation a great deal. How do you like *Miss?*"

"What, Miss Vernon? why I think she's just fit to——But what do *you* think of her, my lady?"

"Oh, odious! such an affectation of superiority! She was always my aversion, as indeed they all are; but really, since this London jaunt, she is quite horrid."

"I quite agree with your la'ship," answered the complaisant Mrs. Ogilvie, who would have done the same if her la'ship had expressed a contrary opinion. "I fancy," she continued, in a monotonous whine, "I fancy Mrs. Arlingham, poor thing! is very unhappy, notwithstanding her grandeur."

"Why yes," replied lady Cotman, with a smile of genuine satisfaction, "that I

believe is certain. I always thought she would be—I knew her temper and his never could suit—both so bad. To tell you the truth—but you will not repeat it —Miss Cotman's refusal of that man made him so angry, and drove him so entirely to despair, that he made Betsey Vernon an offer, without thinking of what he was after, his mind was in such confusion at the time—and you know there was no retracting, though his wish to that effect was evident enough; but he was not a catch for every day; and though to Miss Cotman he was nothing, or Miss Cotman's friends, yet to Betsey Vernon he was a prize not to be relinquished. I dare say he soon repented; I always said they would be miserable, and really one can hardly be sorry—I mean surprised. I'm sure I am quite—hem! hem!—Shall we walk, my dear ma'am? Here comes sir Thomas. Not a word."

Isabella meanwhile, conscious that nothing extravagant could be justly imputed

to her, continued to decorate her child in the elegant presents which Mrs. Charlton had made it, nor dreamed of the remarks to which envy and malignity gave rise. Nor did she conceive she could possibly give offence to any body, when she went in Mrs. Charlton's carriage to return her visits of ceremony; but though every one knew it *was* Mrs. Charlton's, ill natured remarks, and the invidious "*wish* that all this grandeur might last," which evidently proclaimed the *hope* that it might not, followed every call; and if Philipson had really set up his own carriage, there could hardly have been more envy or more bitter comments. Althea at length penetrated into something like the truth, and indignantly, though inwardly, resenting it, became more cold in her manners towards people so illiberal, and gained, still more, a character she had never deserved, of pride, conceit, and haughtiness.

"What a world this is!" said she to Mrs. Charlton, after she had repeated to

her the suspicions she entertained of the littleness of their neighbours. "What an envious, malevolent, world this is! Who would have believed that Isabella's appearing two or three times in your carriage would have subjected her to the sneer and ridicule of fools?"

"I think it likely enough that it may," Mrs. Charlton replied; "but unless you really *know* that it has, why be so indignant? Prove it first."

"I have proved it. I heard that odious Mrs. Ogilvie say to Miss Morley, 'We, you know, my dear, who don't think a carriage necessary to our existence—'—'Yes, or who do not boast of our carriage friends,' answered Miss Morley. The application was enforced by a contemptuous stare at Isabella, and a tittering allusion to grand parson's wives, and a donkey cart as their properest mode of conveyance. Immediately after my sister passed them, and they both shook hands, and made such kind inquiries after the baby, and were so glad that Mrs Charlton had her carriage there,

for it must be a great convenience to an invalid. Isabella, quite unsuspecting such duplicity, thanked them for their civility, and smiled, and looked so happy and placid! I believe that's more than I did, for I really could not return the compliments they attempted to address to me; and I heard Mrs. Ogilvie say, I was grown more odiously proud than ever, and that I should certainly frighten away all the men, and die an old maid, like my friend Mrs. Charlton, for whose society only I was fit. There, however, they paid me a compliment they little intended."

"'Tis a deceitful world, I must own, my dear," said Mrs. Charlton, "and I fear additional experience will not lessen the conviction."

"But what pleasure now, what satisfaction, can it give these people, to say these ill-natured things either of Isabella or me? We never injured them. I do not, besides, expect such instances in the country; it appears only congenial to great towns, and amongst idle dissipated people."

"There you are mistaken: I am afraid envy and ill-nature are the growth of every place, but, perhaps, more so in villages and little towns than in any other situation, for there the most idle are to be found. But, however, Isabella shall still ride in a carriage, as long as I remain with her; and do you despise the sneers and the sneerers too much to condescend to be angry with them. You will probably live a good deal amongst them, and occasional intercourse must take place; it will therefore be better to conciliate than to offend. We must be content to take the world as it is, to enjoy as much as we please, but secretly, our own superiority; but it is necessary to our own comfort, as well as that of society in general, that we should bear with, and overlook, if we can, those faults in our acquaintances we fancy we do not ourselves possess. We cannot live without social intercourse, and there are very few indeed who are so fortunate as to be able to form such a selection as shall

exclude the mean or angry passions to which poor human nature is so degradingly subject."

"All this is very true," replied Althea; "but I had rather live without any other society than my own family for ever, than exchange civilities, which I know are followed by sarcasms, with a set of vulgar illiberal people like these. I never will have any interchange of acquaintance with Mrs. Ogilvie, that I am determined. As to my pride, I shall certainly keep to that as an effectual preservative against the young men, since they are to be so distanced. I believe women in the country, both married and single, have not one idea unconnected with young men, in any one way or another. And such men too!"

"And with this *liberal* and general remark of yours, my dear Althea, we will end our debate."

"Well, I know general remarks in the sarcastic line are almost always illiberal," replied Althea, smiling, "but I really am angry—I cannot deny it."

"No, don't give yourself that trouble," answered Mrs Charlton, "for I should find it difficult to believe you if you did; for 'the angry spot doth glow on Cæsar's brow."

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